

PART II - A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

CHAPTER 7 A GEOLOGIST CONSIDERS GENESIS

"Haven't you read ... that in the beginning, 'the Creator made them' " - Matt. 19:4

CHOOSING A WORLD VIEW

To add some credibility to the perspective being presented, I think it is important to discuss how a 20th Century geologist could come to believe that the world is 6000 years old and that the whole earth was covered with water for a year in Noah's Flood. Until you can understand the reasonableness of such a world view, you will not be able to appreciate the many misconceptions that have been embraced in today's environmentalism.

First, let's consider how a scientist chooses a world view. In college, students are taught scientific facts by those in positions of authority over them. The goal is to impart knowledge that has been accumulated by those who are specialists in their fields. Therefore, as a student, you tend to accept that the curriculum consists of information that you will need for your chosen field. You also assume that the information presented in the physical sciences is accurate. So students are taught, and generally accept, that the earth is billions of years old. By default, other assumptions that are included in their teachers' perspective are also accepted. Life must have progressively evolved from the pre-Cambrian single-celled life forms, through the various mass extinctions of species, to the great diversity that we observe in our modern ecosystems. The fossil record is presented as the evidence for our "scientific" understanding, supplemented by the sequence of the geologic column and radio-isotope dating. Students, as apprentices learning the tools of their trade, dutifully accept it all as an orderly package of information.

Creationist author Richard Bliss, who received his doctorate in science education, expressed it this way:

"Every academic course in science that I've taken has been evolutionary based. I was a thorough-going evolutionist and an agnostic, and I knew that evolution had to be true! Why? Because I was doing invertebrate anatomy the way I was taught. So there was no chance for me to believe anything else, because that's the only way I was taught to think."¹

However, many scientists who initially accepted these modern perspectives, later have had their lives changed through developing a personal relationship with the risen Jesus Christ (commonly known as being "born again"). They then start another apprenticeship process, slowly learning how to live and how to think in a way that is pleasing to God. Soon there arises a conflict between what had been taught in college and what the Bible says. A person who believes in both a literal interpretation of the Bible and the commonly held modern scientific theories concerning the age of the earth will have obvious conflicts in trying to resolve the differences between the two world views. Since both scientific observations and the Word of God are apparently able to communicate different aspects of the truth, there must be a way for the two to fit together.

Some hold that it is necessary to abandon "logical" thinking in order to have "faith" in the inerrancy of the Bible. The strict scientific approach to viewing the world states that forces from outside the physical universe are inherently unmeasurable. Therefore, such things are not appropriate to be included in scientific theories of our universe. If we limit our ourselves to only recognizing the physical world as existing, then it makes sense to conclude that the universe is mechanical and has worked under random forces to achieve what we

have today. In such a view of the universe, which includes only the mechanicalness of chemistry and physics, there is no apparent design, purpose, or destination for our universe. By leaving God out of our picture of the world, we are left with the perspective that all this has no purpose. Without some sense of direction to the universe, our existence is meaningless. People end up with a self-image of being just another one of the animals, no more in the image of God than anything else in nature.

The initial assumption of this perspective essentially defines God out of existence. Its proponents will say that the idea of a God is not something that they object to. But they will not allow the "idea" of a God to be included in any theories concerning the physical world. So the real question seems to be, "how does God involve himself with his creation?" The Bible does not attempt to prove that God exists. It assumes that it is obvious. Since the people who developed the theory of evolution did so in part to replace the need for the concept of God, obviously belief in the God of the Bible is not compatible with the assumptions which go along with such an outlook.

Since few people seem to so completely deny the existence of the supernatural, a more popular position is the idea that the world is an endless balance between good and evil forces. This seems consistent with the ongoing struggle that we see in nature. This position is also able to offer hope, because it assumes that the events of the world are not simply random and meaningless. Yet when you think about it a little further, this point of view places Satan as an equal to God. It is also not consistent with the fact that in the beginning God created all things as good.

Modern science assumes that if there is a God, he does not intervene in his creation. Such a God would have merely set the initial rules for the operation of the universe. In writing about the philosophical history of our relationship to the environment, Jeremy Rifkin wrote:

"Descartes observed that anything that can be investigated can be measured. He made it [nature] a precise, orderly machine. For the world to be completely predictable, God would not intervene in the affairs of life. God was congratulated for his design then retired."²

This "Deist" way of thinking says that after God created the world, he stepped back to watch things play themselves out. This allows people to have a God that is the creator, without having him interrupt the laws of nature or their own lives. But the Bible says that God is active in his creation, not merely a spectator. Through the prophet Isaiah, God has told us: "Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear."³ God has been a participant in human history. This is what the Apostle John was telling us when he wrote: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory".⁴

Perhaps instead this active God is using evolution to perform his creating in phases? Call it a "progressive creation". This would be compatible with those who say that the world is quite old. But this is inconsistent with the fact that the Bible says that "Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin ... [So] death reigned from the time of Adam".⁵ Evolution could not have been occurring for a billion years prior to man being created, because a billion years of the "survival of the fittest" competition of evolution would have included an enormous amount of suffering and death. That would mean death, and so sin, had been in the world long before Adam. Using this view of origins, man was not created until a billion years after the first creature had died, so his sin could not have been the cause of the Fall. If the creation waits to "be liberated from its bondage to decay"⁶ brought on by the curse, how could this bondage be part of the "good" creation that existed before the Fall?

The concept of a progressive creation also does not resolve the fact that evolution is in conflict with the sequence that Genesis chapter 1 gives for God's making the plants and animals. For example, the Bible states that birds were created on the fifth day,⁷ but the land animals which evolutionists teach evolved into the birds were not created until the sixth day.

Many people believe that both the Bible and the theories of modern science are completely correct. But then if the world were only about 6000 years old, what do all the fossils mean, and why does geologic dating suggest that it is quite old? The "Gap Theory" is used to try to resolve this conflict. This is the

idea that all geologic history and evolution fit between Genesis 1:1 and the rest of the Bible. God created the heavens and earth, and then geologic time passed, forming the fossil record of evolution. Then some unknown crisis wiped out all things leaving the earth to be "formless and empty".⁸ This would have been the condition of the world when God spoke the present "good" ecology into being starting on the second day.

Several prominent Bible colleges teach this viewpoint. It is a theory that is easy to get comfortable with since it permits both scientific and religious schools of thought to co-exist without having to modify either. This allows spiritual people to focus on spiritual things without having to get involved with all this science that they have no interest in trying to comprehend. But if you understand what this theory is saying, it becomes apparent that it is not good science. Geology does not support the idea of such an unknown crisis.

In summary, these attempts to find compromise positions between commonly held geologic theories and biblical inerrancy do not stand the test of a critical analysis. They are merely compromises which do not yield a satisfying resolution to these questions.

AN AWARENESS THAT GOD EXISTS

Most people have confidence in science, but also believe there is a God. The fact that those claiming to speak for science teach something other than what a straight-forward reading of the Bible leaves people with conflicting world views of origins. One view is promoted by the scientific community, the other is the creation story from the Bible. This has led well-intentioned people to come up with these imaginative theories. Unfortunately, in each of the positions which were just described, the integrity of one or both of the original viewpoints has been subverted. With any of the various hybrid models for God's involvement in the creation, people are left not really believing the philosophical basis for either view of the world.

Once you recognize the errors in each of these alternative theories, it becomes apparent that the Bible does actually state that the world was much closer to 6,000 years old than several billion. So how could this possibly be true given the facts that anyone with a scientific mind can go and measure for themselves? If the Bible is the accurate Word of God, then there must be something wrong with a strictly mechanical view of the universe. This question can be resolved when you recognize that the Bible is the truth given to us by God to teach us things that we are otherwise unable to discern on our own. We can build onto the biblical truth with the knowledge of the creation that we gather using science.

Read the writings of people doing scientific research who were interpreting the data from the framework of a recent creation, rather than using an evolutionary premise. Then read their critics. The two sides of the creation-evolution issue both make persuasive arguments based on their own point of view. The technical, as well as philosophical, arguments supporting each position are strong and uncompromising. How can both sides be so certain of the accuracy of their beliefs when they are so mutually exclusive?

The key is that both positions are founded on beliefs, rather than technical matters. It is the conceptual starting point that is the basis for the conclusions each is getting from the same set of facts. The data itself is unbiased, it is the initial assumptions which the data is applied to that differs in these world views. The concept of a primordial earth where life has been formed through evolution is premised on a universe with no Creator. If you acknowledge God as Creator, there is no need to retain the idea that he did it through evolution. Then if you are not trying to explain why evolution seems feasible, there is no reason to have all your theories favor the idea that the universe is billions of years old.

Obviously both positions cannot be correct. But with the wrong starting point people can use perfect logic to interpret the facts and still be entirely wrong in their conclusions.

Once you understand that the primary issue was not good science and bad science, but the perspective of your world view, you find that you do not have to leave behind your analytical mind when reading the Bible. The Scriptures are not in conflict with science. One does not contradict the other. It is the theories developed by those who refuse to consider the existence of God as a living, active entity, as he has revealed himself in the Bible, which are in conflict with Scripture. Science itself fits just fine with the declaration made in Genesis that the world and every kind of creature were created in six days⁹ about six thousand years ago.

In case you are still doubting that this is actually what the Bible says, consider this. The fact that God created the heavens, the earth and all that is in them in six days is also stated in the Ten Commandments as the justification for observing the Sabbath.¹⁰

WHY DID MODERN SCIENCE LEAVE THE CHURCH?

There is still more than one workable theory of origins. Science has never disproved the idea of a young earth, a six day creation or a world-wide flood. Those ideas were simply discarded as irrelevant when they became scientifically, philosophically and politically looked down upon. (A brief description of how the earth's geology is consistent with the concept of a global flood is provided in Appendix A.) But over the years, as scientists have dismissed the Church as being irrelevant, they have not merely rejected a distorted image of God. They also have rejected the concept of God altogether, considering it to be a distorted view of nature.

This has occurred in part because those speaking for the Church through the ages have frequently not been knowledgeable concerning the physical workings of nature. The Church's slowness to embrace new insights into God's creation lead those working in science to feel that their own understanding could replace Christianity as a thinking person's way of finding the truth. They felt people no longer needed the concept of God to explain the world around them. In some ways, they were correct, because too often the Church has presented an image of a passive God which has been easily replaced by scientific theories. This happens whenever the Church itself stops looking at the Bible to see what God has said and instead becomes dependent on the assumptions that its "traditions" had been founded upon.

This belittling of the Bible's scientific accuracy has influenced the view of the world for both those who accept and those who reject God. Science has been left to technical people, but unfortunately most schools for technical people present a picture of a world formed by natural forces. Those who have been trained in the sciences, especially in the earth sciences, no longer have a clear image of who God is, because he no longer plays a role in their mental image of the world. The incomprehensible length of what is referred to as "geologic time" causes the workings of God in the "here and now" to be obscured. For the ecologist looking for a reason why things are as they are, and what they will become, the billions of years necessary for evolution has replaced the biblical concept of eternity - past and future.

In seeing the world blurred through of this altered view of eternity, people no longer see God as having an active role to play in the world. He is not considered to be someone who they could actually turn to for help. Those holding this perspective experience the futility of being unable to stop the degradation of the environment and are left with no hope. They can see man's smallness in relation to nature, but they mistake that smallness to be a lack of worth.

This blurred image has blinded them to the active involvement of God in his creation. They are left with no one to turn to with their sense of futility at seeing others neglecting what is precious to them. The violence which man does to nature and fellow man makes no sense to them. Corruption, to them, is a choice which is made in violation of the "good will" which they suppose that we all are born with.

Even with this inability to stop the deterioration of the world around them, the image of geologic time forces people to leave God out of the picture. They view God as either detached from his creation, or being somewhat helplessly within the creation itself, or even being completely unnecessary. None of

these concepts of God encourages a person to turn to God for help. The picture they offer has no means for God to respond to a plea from within the creation to do something.

A PERSPECTIVE FROM OUTSIDE NATURE

If we do not consider God as being the Creator and a participant in nature, we are left to "infer" what we have not seen based on the facts that we have available to us. This is somewhat similar to the situation that Job and his friends struggled with as they tried to come to grips with one aspect of God's creation. They sought to understand why tragedies and illness had come into Job's life. But, as chapter 1 of the Book of Job shows us, there were facts concerning their circumstances that they could not have determined on their own. God never did answer Job's questions. God did not choose to explain it to Job and so he and his friends struggled with unprovable theories.

This is not so different than our use of the scientific method to study the universe as we try to understand the meaning and origins of our world. There is always something more to be discovered in any field of science. We will never understand things fully, especially in relation to events in the past which we can only speculate about. We can observe and measure what exists today and make reasonable hypotheses about things like ancient carbon dioxide contents in the atmosphere, the accumulation rate of glacial ice and the meaning of deep space radiation fluctuations. Like Job, we are trying to come to grips with something that we can never fully know on our own without a special revelation of knowledge from outside our earthly frame of reference.

What we know as "nature" is all that modern man has ever experienced. We have come to assume that the beauty and the strife which we see present in the world today is what God made as his "good" creation. I am convinced that this is not what the Bible teaches. The Scriptures clearly state that suffering and death entered the world as a result of man's challenging God's right to make the rules.¹¹ Unless you assume that the destructive forces of nature were present in the "good" garden which God gave to his innocent children, it is difficult to conclude from the Scriptures that the harsh climates we experience were part of the original creation. You would also have to limit the death which was brought on by the curse to being strictly spiritual, which is inconsistent with the idea of a "second" death as presented in Revelation chapter 20.¹²

IGNORING FIRST HAND ACCOUNTS

It is human nature to have confidence in things that we can see with our own eyes. At the same time, most of a person's knowledge of the world is handed down from those around us and those who have come before us. We also communicate our own observations to others, so that they can learn from the knowledge that we have gained.

But what about things that we see which will not exist in the future? We can hardly conceive that as recently as the 1500s much of New England was covered with old-growth forests. Will people one day doubt that there was ever an Amazon rain forest? Today we wonder what became of the Mayan culture of Central America a thousand years ago. They left no record of what happened to them.

There are some things that we cannot determine with our own eyes. We have to trust those that were present at that time to record what happened. But over time we can come to doubt the "facts" that were formerly accepted through written accounts by eye witnesses. If those accounts don't match our current observations, we could simply ignore them as unscientific and consider the eye witnesses to have been primitive and uneducated people trying to describe the same occurrences we see today. Or we could dismiss their accounts as the fanciful myths of a "religious tradition" and allow it to have no place in "modern" thinking. It is a question of whether we consider those eye witness accounts to be trustworthy.

But what about things that are outside the physical realm, which we cannot investigate first hand. There are things we will not come to understand on our own without a dependence on what God has taught to men in the past. Consider the biblical teaching that the creation is deteriorating rather than advancing. From that perspective, it is not inconceivable that there were once processes occurring on the earth that no longer happen because the necessary conditions for them no longer exist. This could be called the "extinction" of a physical process.

To over simplify this idea, picture the assertion of those who speculate that the hole in the ozone is nothing new, it has always been there. Yes, such an assertion can be considered an interesting theory, but when it was compared to models of the upper atmosphere such a theory was rejected.

So then, if the present ozone layer is able to undergo such changes, why could there not have once been another entire layer which screened out even more of the harmful types of radiation? This is consistent with the idea of a "good" creation, where the earth was designed to be protective of life, rather than hostile to it. It is also consistent with the biblical account of the second day of creation which indicated that the sky separated the water on the earth's surface from the water in the upper atmosphere. Genesis 1:6-8 reads, "Let there be an expanse between the waters ... and separate the water under the expanse from the water above it."

A working theory about such a "vapor canopy" is presently being investigated which attempts to use modern atmospheric modeling techniques to better understand the biblical account of conditions in the pre-Flood world. According to various publications by the Institute of Creation Research and others, such a vapor canopy would have consisted of a layer of water in its gaseous state in the upper atmosphere, not unlike the present ozone layer. Today, the water present in our atmosphere is to large degree represented by visible water particulates in clouds. Since the canopy would have been a vapor not a liquid, it would not have inhibited incoming visible sunlight as a cloudy day would do. This vapor canopy would have been fully transparent to visible light since it was a gas, but would have absorbed the higher energy wavelengths. It would thereby provide a protective shell against some of the radiation which presently penetrates the atmosphere.¹³

To be condensed into rain, such a layer of water vapor would have needed large volumes of particulates in the upper atmosphere. This is the principle behind seeding a cloud to make it rain. John Whitcomb describes how this might have occurred in his book *"The Genesis Flood"*:

"When finally that 'something' happened, what it was - possibly the passage of the earth through a meteorite swarm or the sudden extrusion of large amounts of volcanic dust into the air - the vapor blanket was condensed and precipitated. As the Scripture describes it, 'the flood-gates of heaven were opened,' "¹⁴

So then, is a historical account that says that it rained for forty days and forty nights necessarily unreasonable? Is it really wise for us to ignore such an account as a myth made by unscientific minds, just because our modern observations indicate that it could not occur that way today.

If the biblical account does refer to such a layer in the atmosphere, what other changes would have occurred as a result of its loss? Since water vapor is one of the green-house gases, the earth might have been significantly warmer during the period when such a vapor canopy still existed.¹⁵ It would have minimized temperature fluctuations, potentially even eliminating the major temperature differences between the equator and the poles. This is consistent with the observation that in the past the oceans were warmer than they are presently.

By considering "geologic" climatic events only in the context of a planet that is billions of years old, modern science has missed the potential for a more short-term cause and effect relationship as the cause of historic climatic changes. But if these things happened in the span of several hundred years in a period when man was present on the earth recording what he was seeing, would you picture that account being all that different than what was recorded in the Bible? Remember, we are not necessarily talking about

good science and bad science. We are simply modifying the way that we approach forming theories, so that we change the foundational premises to which our scientific measurements are being applied.

ISSUES OF MORE ETERNAL SIGNIFICANCE

The average person does not have the time to try and understand the basis of scientific claims. So we trust scientists to explain the world to us, just as we trust the clergy to explain religion to us. We have such faith in science that, if most scientists claim that the mechanical working of the universe points back to a "Big Bang" billions of years ago, we are not going to question it. Most people have been willing to accept that the Bible's creation story is merely another parable. Like Santa Claus, it is just another childhood story to be put aside as we grow up.

Most church-goers have chosen to not become embroiled in a "scientific" dispute, preferring to deal with issues of more eternal significance. It is easier to just incorporate ideas that the culture accepts into our own way of thinking and limit the Bible to being true in spiritual matters only. Christians have preferred to focus on concerns such as the eternal fate of souls, the health and growth of the church and the legislative fight to discourage moral decay.

But in accepting the extended age of the earth, they are in fact embracing all the evolutionary assumptions of its founders who denied that God even existed. People have mentally stopped resisting the claim that theories based on evolution are more justifiable than theories based on a recent creation. Effectively, these well-meaning people are publicly endorsing the idea that not all of the Bible is accurate, that it is accurate in doctrine, but not in science. Essentially, they do not know what to do with everything from the Tower of Babel back to the creation. It is easier to not argue against the modern assertion that the first eleven chapters of Genesis are merely the mythology of verbal traditions. People do this in spite of the fact that Jesus referred to these things as actual history.¹⁶

By not really "believing" what the Bible teaches, compromising on the biblical account of creation undermines every other claim the Church makes. "Faith" that God can and will do what he said is subverted when we start to question if he meant what he seems to have said. For believers, the result is lukewarmness. It becomes easier for people to continue to live in both worlds. What is not "reasonable" to modern science - the creation, the judgments, the miracles - is attributed to some passive hand of "fate," rather than the active hand of God. By discarding so much of what the Bible uses to describe the character of God, you end up with an image of a small god who is unable or unwilling to be involved in our personal affairs. He is no longer active, unable to intervene and unable to enforce his authority.

People may trust Jesus spiritually to be their means of being forgiven by God, but they no longer recognize that they can seek his assistance to change the way they are living. As a result of this lack of faith, the Word of God has been invalidated in the eyes of many for the sake of a tradition which is founded upon the infallibility of the latest scientific theories. Yet at the same time, if someone tries to view the world from a God-centered perspective, they are accused of invalidating science for the "tradition" of considering the Bible infallible.

Our treating the Bible as though it were not reliable casts doubt, not only on the accuracy of Genesis, but also on the accuracy the gospels. If those wondering whether Christianity is really true see that we don't really believe in something they know the Bible teaches, why should they believe any of it is reliable? Why should they trust such a small god to get them out of the mess they have made with their lives? They are looking for someone who can fix big problems.

CHAPTER 8 CHOOSING YOUR PRIORITIES

*"Are you not in error because you do not know
the Scriptures or the power of God?" - Mark 12:24*

STEWARDS OR INTRUDERS?

Where do we fit into God's plan for the ecology of the world? Are we part of the natural world or is mankind something separate? It is apparent that we are different than the rest of the creation. Our actions are able to make changes to our environment to a greater extent than any of our "fellow creatures." Have we stepped outside of our place in the world or were we made this way for a specific purpose? Our ability to work the land and to care for its creatures has great potential for causing the creation to blossom. Though the Bible describes us as merely tenants, we have taken from the earth without regard for the wishes of its owner, God.

The earth has not prospered under our care. As we have tried to tend the creation and cause it to flourish, our ineptitude has become obvious. As a result people have come to view man's involvement with nature as primarily destructive. Sure, we have the ability to cure diseases, mend wounds and protect the domestic creatures that depend upon us. But at the same time we are being told by some that things are better off in their wild state, without our interference. Some people even assert that any imbalance which exists in nature is our fault. What does the Bible say our role in nature was meant to be?

Consider the position of stewardship that we held while we were still in Eden. Picture Adam and Eve as the graduate students of a master-gardener college professor. They had an advanced ability to comprehend the world they were placed in and had access to the Creator's experience and knowledge. They were equipped in ways that made them perfectly suited for their roles as caretakers of the creation.

In comparison, those tending the world today are merely grade school students. We lack understanding and have no one experienced to show us how things should be done. We no longer have access to the wealth of knowledge that a daily walk through the Garden with God provided. Though we try to do what is best, we are distractible, like children. Our desires cause our motives to tend toward selfishness and self-gratification. As a result of our misplaced priorities and imperfect knowledge, inaccuracies permeate our judgment.

An illustration of what happens when we apply imperfect knowledge to our interpretation of reality can be seen in the response Jesus gave to a question from the Sadducees. They asked him which of her husbands a woman would be married to in heaven, if she had been widowed several times. To point out the misconception in their question, Jesus told them, "Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God?"¹⁷ The basic principle here is that a knowledge of Scripture is necessary for a proper understanding of things we cannot see.

We can apply that concept to the "balance of nature." The world as we see it today seems right because it is all we have ever known. We have built our perspective upon the world which is in front of us to view. Therefore, it seems only "natural" for predators to be an integral part of the "food chain." In our desire to restore ecological balance, we are now re-introducing of wolves, mountain lions and other predators. For generations we have tried to drive these creatures from the land in order to "tame the wilderness," making it safe for our towns, families and livestock. Today, we are being told that this was abuse of the land. What is appropriate?

DOES GOD THINK LIKE WE DO?

We see the earth from a human perspective. God sees it as part of the bigger picture. Too often we project our own perspectives upon God and assume that he reasons like we do. Because people feel God is absent from the world, they get possessive about his creation for him. The error in that perspective can be seen in the following illustration.

For a decade, my wife and I lived in a suburban neighborhood on a third of an acre. She loves flowers, herbs and English country gardens. So over the years we transformed a suburban lawn into a major work of beauty and biodiversity. There was color and symmetry, fragrance and texture. It provided a place of refuge where creatures could find food, water and shelter.

After we moved to the country, we drove by the house to see how the new owners were appreciating the work of our hands. We found that the vines and shrubs, the trellises and fencing had all been cut down. The new owners' image of how to use the land was totally different than ours had been. They had taken possession of the land and destroyed the garden.

Of course these things were to be expected. Each family wants to have their home reflect their own character and needs. But people look at nature from that same possessive point of view. We reason that God created nature just as we find it in the "undisturbed" "natural" habitats of the world: the North American old growth forests; the rain forests of South America and New Guinea; the Serengeti Plains; the Alaskan wilderness. These are unaltered "natural" habitats. We argue that wilderness areas should stay just the way we find them. We feel that the "balance" which God has created in nature should not be changed. Like the garden in the suburbs, we look at the beauty in nature and we project our emotions on God. We try to speak to others for God, telling them they must preserve things just as God has given them to us.

The balance of nature in North America in the Twentieth Century is very different than it was when the Pilgrims landed. In response to this realization, some have recently tried to restore the prior conditions. We are reintroducing predators that past generations sought to push from the land for four centuries. While I am not suggesting that preserving wilderness is not important or that any creature be driven to extinction, we should question some of the attitudes that we have about nature. Instead of assuming that the Creator thinks like we do, we should try to understand what God's priorities are by looking to see what He has already said on a subject.

LEARNING GOD'S PERSPECTIVE ON NATURE

We can learn a lot about nature by looking at what Jesus had to say about it. His words in the Sermon on the Mount confront many beliefs that are widespread in our day. In using them as object lessons, Jesus implies that dogs and pigs are less worthy of good things than others, a snake is something treacherous, wolves are destructive and thorn bushes and thistles yield bad fruit.¹⁸

If these were merely the cultural attitudes of that day, which Jesus did not share, shouldn't he have been correcting rather than reinforcing these perceptions? Didn't he know that statements like this would be used to fuel the destructive outlooks of many who would abuse against nature? If modern thought would label Jesus as being foolish, I think it is time that we take a closer look at the presumptions that have gone into modern thought and determine who it is here that is lacking discernment.

In John's gospel, Jesus is first introduced to the reader with this description:

"through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made".¹⁹

Try to grasp what is happening in these passages. The one who made everything in the creation and called it good during the account of the creation²⁰ is now speaking poorly of creatures within that

creation. What happened? The Maker of all things appears to have withdrawn his hearty endorsement of nature and now refers to it when he needs to illustrate something as a bad example. Between the time when Scripture says "it was good"²¹ and the time when Jesus said, "do not give dogs what is sacred"²² came the Fall of man and the subsequent curse upon the land.

This corruption of the original creation can be better understood through Jesus’ choice of metaphors in the parable of the wheat and the tares.

"The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But ... his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat ... When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

"The servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?'

"An enemy did this,' he replied.

"The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?'

"No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest.'"²³

Similarly, in referring to hypocrites Jesus stated one of God's principles for the creation. "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots".²⁴ He said this in a passage of Matthew's gospel which follows immediately after his walking on the water and prior to his multiplying the loaves and fish to feed 4000 people. God intervened in the physical creation as a sanctioning of what Jesus was saying. Therefore, the opinions that Jesus was expressing are worth noting, because they are backed up with action. He was not just one of many moral teachers. As Jesus said, "at least believe on the evidence of the miracles".²⁵

While protection the environment is certainly a worthwhile endeavor, the Bible makes it clear that nature, as we know it, has changed considerably since it was given to us in Eden. A scriptural perspective of nature needs to include the fact that today’s balance of nature, even in those “pristine” areas, has lost the harmony of its original state.

LEARNING FROM JESUS’ PRIORITIES

To learn more about the priorities that Jesus taught his disciples, follow me through one sample of his teaching. In chapter 6 of Mark’s gospel, Jesus tells his hard working disciples:

"come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.' So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place."²⁶

Doesn't even the setting tell you that this is going to be one of Jesus' talks on his concerns about nature. They finally get a couple of days off and take the boat across the lake to a little secluded cove. This is the chance to learn about the creation from the craftsman who was there in the beginning to make all things. Watch how Jesus teaches the disciples by example:

"When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd [which had followed them around the lake], he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things."²⁷

There were thousands of people, who had come hoping to hear Jesus teach. The disciples had no doubt gotten their hopes up about taking it easy for a couple days, but things did not work out according to what

they had expected. Yet through this Jesus gave them profound, practical teaching on our relationship to God and the environment.

The gospel of Mark continues the account, providing details of what occurred once Jesus had concluded teaching the crowd:

"By this time it was late in the day, so the disciples came to him [Jesus], 'This is a remote place,' they said 'and it's already very late. Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.' But he answered, 'You give them something to eat.'"²⁸

The disciples had assumed that he was asking them to go out and buy supper for 4,000 families. All they could picture was the fact that they did not have that kind of money. The task was too great for them. Of course, this was exactly the point Jesus was trying to make. The disciples were trying to accomplish it under their own strength. They were not yet depending on God to do the things that they could not do themselves.

Mark builds upon this idea by recounting the disciples' terror that same night over what they thought was a ghost walking on the water. He concludes that account with the comment:

"They were completely amazed, for they had not understood about the loaves."²⁹

Understood what? They had panicked because they were still not willing to trust God to meet their needs when they had reached their own limitations. This text is saying that the point of the multiplication of the loaves was to teach them about their dependence on God for their physical needs, and God's ability to meet those needs. This was the lesson that Jesus gave them during their wilderness retreat.

Today, some people might expect that when Jesus brought the disciples to a remote place, far from the distractions of the city, it would be an opportunity for them to commune with God and nature. This is the focus of some modern Christian wilderness retreats. But that is not what Jesus was showing his disciples. Or perhaps he would be equipping them to go and rescue God's creation. He would first show them how to get their spiritual life in proper order, then they could go save the planet from the destructiveness of mankind. But that was not what Jesus was demonstrating to them. He brought them into the wilderness to teach them by example about their dependence on God, and about the importance of people.

Like them, we too need to first acknowledge that on our own we are hopelessly inept to do anything about the problems we are facing. He was teaching them to do the opposite of what we would expect to do. Our job is to recognize that we need to turn to God for help. Only then will we recognize our dependence on God and become willing to call out to God for help.

MORALITY BY CONSENSUS

Now that we have learned something about the priorities which God has shown us through his own dealings with mankind and the creation, how is this different from what people are presently expressing concern about? Have you considered what about the threat to the environment actually worries us? Is it the impact of ecological changes on man, or on man's dwelling place or on the global ecosystem?

Every time a tree is cut it is an environmental crisis for the squirrels and birds who live in it or depend on it for food. If I clear the trees to make a building lot or a field to farm, the amount of change is greater, the number of animals displaced increases. The number of plants to be cut down increases. The size of the forest shrinks making competition for food and space greater among the forest creatures who do not benefit from the open space.

At what point is the cost to the environment unacceptable when balanced against the benefit to man and the establishment of new habitats for other creatures? If I put in a shopping mall and sell the topsoil from twenty acres have I reached the point where the cost was too high? If that land were instead used as a regional landfill with state-of-the-art technology to protect the ground water, is that a more acceptable choice environmentally? If the land is to be used to grow seedlings for replanting forests is that an acceptable reason to clear a parcel?

Mankind insists on its right to continue its destructive practices. In many cases, the decisions that were black and white have already been made. Now we must live with the consequences of those prior decisions. Instead of deciding what is right and wrong, often the only options we have to choose between are shades of gray. It is not right to cut one tree and wrong to cut ten, or right to build one thing and wrong to build another. It is the motivation behind the action that makes it a moral issue. If we were not greedy for quick profit, we would not abuse the land. If we were not wasteful with the resources that God entrusted to our care, we would not need to be concerned about what will be left for future generations.

Having made these decisions and seeing the vagueness of many of the options we now have, our culture has developed the attitude that there are no absolutes. We must struggle to maintain a balance through trial and error. We have come to the point where we even apply this scientific method of experimentation to our morality. This has resulted in efforts to change our laws to make them more compatible with what we think is right. Yet consider that if people can decide their own laws, then each of us becomes a lobbyist supporting our own opinions. What we would like to be legal reflects that which would maximize our individual benefits.

Local and national laws change according to popular opinion and political trends. As people see cultural views of right and wrong changing over time, it becomes apparent that our laws are based on opinions. People then determine to do whatever seems right to them. How can you convince an 18 year-old that a drinking age of 21 is proper, when he knows that in the 1980s the "right" to buy liquor was taken away from 18 year-olds? Our laws are fickle and our law-makers are unable to back them up with anything more than theory. There is no underlying truth in our society, no "Thus says the Lord!"⁵⁰ to restrain the social ills which were only minor problems 50 years ago.

WHO DECIDES IF SOMETHING IS WRONG?

How do we determine right from wrong in a less than perfect world? Are the underlying standards inherent to the world just relative? Do we obey the laws and nothing more? Have our ethics been reduced to not breaking the law? Or to put it more clearly, are we forbidden from doing something only until we have changed the law of the land to make it legal? There is nothing in this view of relative truth requiring an expression of concern for others, for future generations, or for abstracts such as beauty, nature or environmental quality. If you feel that these concerns must be part of any standard of behavior, then you actually believe that there is some absolute truth.

This concept is now turning into an ethical dilemma for many people. If we expect that people will behave ethically toward the environment, then we are assuming that there is some moral absolute or at least a moral consensus. Otherwise, who are we to tell someone else what is right and what is wrong. We would have to be satisfied with the relative value judgments of each individual concerning what is acceptable. To one person a whale is like a brother, to another it is livestock to be harvested. If we are to consider one or both of these perspectives wrong, then we are saying there is right and wrong. How can someone live their personal life saying that right and wrong are relative to the given situation, when at the same time they are saying that there are things that must never be done because it will harm the environment? They are in fact saying that we have gotten ourselves into this ecological problem because we do not know right from wrong. Such absolutes are exactly what they have been unwilling to submit their own behavior to.

We all understand that nature is not a democracy. You would think it absurd to believe that a penguin could be living freely in the heat of Texas or that a wild deer could be roaming freely the paved neighborhoods of the Bronx. We understand the concept of habitats. Certain creatures need certain conditions to live in. No change in public opinion will make the penguin or deer thrive where it physically cannot.

If this is so, why is it so hard to believe that we cannot arbitrarily choose what is right and what is wrong? If nature is not a democracy, why should truth be any different? Even with the somewhat arbitrary way we make and then change our laws, we still punish those who break them. Is it reasonable for a person to believe that people have the authority to judge right and wrong in the universe?

So then how are we to determine what the rules of right and wrong are for this world? There are rules we recognize. If you walk across a highway, you may get run over. If you smoke, you might get cancer. If you have sex, a child may be conceived. If a child rebels against his parent, he might be disciplined. This is simply the law of cause and effect at work. Remember, the Bible says that God is not merely a spectator in such ethical dilemmas. He is the one who has set the standards by which the creation was designed and is now governed. It is God's standards that we are in rebellion against when we say that there is no universal standard to live by, merely changeable cultural norms. If we rebel against the physical laws or the spiritual laws that God has set in place in the universe, then sooner or later, like children, we can expect to get "spanked" for it.

In our rebellion against God's authority over us, we pretend that parts of the Bible are not true, if we will admit that any of it is at all. We recognize few laws that are eternal. We have few morals that are unchanging. In contrast to this, the Bible says of God, "All your words are true and all your righteous laws eternal."³¹ We are not like God, and do not want him to rule over us. In his parable about the tenants of the vineyard, Jesus portrayed our attitude by saying: "This is the heir. Come, let's kill the him, and the inheritance will be ours."³² If people can kill the idea that the God of the Bible ever existed, then they would have no higher authority to impose rules upon them.

The Bible addresses this issue, saying:

"Why do the nations conspire ... and the rulers gather together against the Lord ... 'Let us break their chains,' they say, 'and throw off their fetters.'"³³

Or as Jesus said in the parable of the three servants:

"his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, 'We don't want this man to be our king.'"³⁴

In response to this rebellion against God's authority by the subjects whom Jesus described as the king's enemies,³⁵ God "rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath".³⁶

Still the Bible reminds us:

"He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. ... As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him ... with those who keep his covenant and remember his precepts."³⁷

A DISOBEDIENT AND OBSTINATE PEOPLE

We need to have our values clarified. We need to understand what God considers valuable. We would not commend an industry for breaking the law less often when they decide to dump their hazardous wastes less frequently. Neither do our own attempts at good works to make up for all the things we are doing wrong. Instead God is offering us a general amnesty program:

"It is by grace that you have been saved, through faith, - and this not of yourselves, it is a gift of God - not by works, so the no one can boast."³⁸

"Grace" is a word that we too often skip over without really thinking about what it means. Let me try to phrase that another way. The creation was designed and constructed, and is now held together against the destructive forces of its own corrupted nature, simply because it was what God wanted. It pleased him to do it. We did not do anything to deserve to be spared being tossed in the fire like a thorn bush that is cleared from a field. Though we are unmanageable, he is patient. Creation has been spoiled, but God is in the recycling business. It is his good pleasure to see his creation "liberated from its bondage to decay".³⁹ That is "grace". Not that we did anything for him, but that he reached out for us.

Don't look at famine, war or AIDS merely as a nation or a group of people being singled out for judgment. A better way to look at these situations would be in the context of the parable of the land owner growing impatient with a tree that does not bear fruit.⁴⁰ If it was not for God's desire that his rebellious creation bear good fruit, we would all end up desolate, like the salt flats near the Dead Sea, which are all that remains of the city of Sodom.

Were it not for his compassion, we would have all perished in our rebellion. But instead God has shown us patience:

"To a nation that did not call on my name, I said, 'Here am I, here I am.' All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people".⁴¹

"As when juice is still found in a cluster of grapes and men say, 'Don't destroy it, there is yet some good in it,' so will I do on behalf of my servants; I will not destroy them all."⁴²

"[But to] a people who continually provoke me to my very face [doing what they were specifically told not to do] ... I will not keep silent but will pay back in full ... I called but you did not listen. You did evil in my sight and chose what displeases me."⁴³

Therefore God said:

"They have chosen their own ways, and their souls delight in abominations; so I will choose harsh treatment for them and will bring upon them what they dread."⁴⁴

In a similar way, this is how Jeremiah described Jerusalem as it was being forced to suffer for the wicked things which were done in it:

"The people of Israel and Judah have done nothing but evil in my sight from their youth; indeed the people of Israel have done nothing but provoke me with what their hands have made, declares the Lord. From the day it was built until now, this city has so aroused my anger and wrath that I must remove it from my sight. ... [they] turned their backs to me ... would not listen or respond to discipline ... [and did detestable things that] I never commanded".⁴⁵

Remember this is being said about Israel, a people who claimed to be following God. But their calling themselves God's children was simply lip service. They refused to listen and behaved however they saw fit.

But of others God says:

"this is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word".⁴⁶

In God's eyes there is good behavior and evil behavior. He uses discipline to teach us right from wrong, much like we would teach our own children. When our children ignore our rules, they will eventually

provoke us into responding. The punishment which our children receive is for their own good, to protect them from the harm their bad habits will cause them.

God has stated that he considers the use of discipline to be the proper way to care for his own children. When Scripture describes God teaching, disciplining and finally becoming angry with his disobedient children, to some limited extent we can understand his emotions as a father. Even we, who are relatively unskilled and uncertain as parents, do these things.

Now try to see our own age in the same light. God has given us written guidance in the Bible and we have ignored his instruction. In response, he has disciplined us in various ways. Some of these things are what we consider to be the causes of environmental degradation, such as the conditions of economic distress which leads to people to over-utilizing the land. When despite our being corrected, we further provoke God by turning our backs on him, he eventually allows harsher forms of discipline - disease, famine and lawlessness, to afflict nation after nation in this world who refuse to listen.

How far would we let our children go before taking decisive action to get their attention? God allowed Israel to face various types of climatic, economic and political oppression, and finally allowed the Babylonians to take them into captivity. Why should we think he would do any less to correct our rebellion today? It is only because of God's mercy that we have not been destroyed by the forces of the world around us.

CHAPTER 9 A DISTORTED WORLD

"Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life." - Genesis 3:1

THE WORLD WAS DISTORTED BY SIN

People tend to think of this world as a nurturing place which has brought us into being. We hear so much about living in harmony with the land and the earth being our mother. How could these things possibly be true with all the suffering, stark landscapes and inclement weather that characterizes the world as we know it? Yes, there is beauty, fruitful harvests and great multitudes of creatures, but this is beauty in the midst of vast areas of barren rock, drought stricken desert and perpetual ice. Much of the wondrous abundance of creatures spend each day in a life and death struggle fleeing from one another, while trying to get enough food to survive. Nature, as we know it, is bountiful, but it sustains itself at great cost to its participants. To a spectator the food chain is a self-sustaining balance. To a participant the food chain is cause for continual anxiety about their own safety.

We live in a fallen world. As the saying goes, "the only things sure are death and taxes." Death is a sure thing. By eating healthy and taking care of ourselves we may live a few years longer, but each person and animal will one day physically perish. Even though this is the way the world is today, we need not assume that this was the way that it was meant to be. The Bible does not teach that death has always been a part of this world. Yet, when someone dies of old age we say they "died of natural causes". Our concept of nature, prior to the Fall and its curse, should not require us to think that way.

The warning given to Adam in the Garden concerning the forbidden fruit was "in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."⁴⁷ The Bible teaches that as a consequence of Adam's willful defiance of what he had been told, nature is now trapped in decay and death. The world we dwell in is not Eden. Nature has been drastically changed.

On a recent nature program on PBS, it was stated: "The hawk is not cruel. It is simply getting nourishment the only way that nature has provided for it." Such a claim ignores the fact that the Bible says in the beginning God gave the beasts of the earth every green plant as their food.⁴⁸

Before believing this type of "naturalist" assertion, consider it in the context of what Jesus described as the reason for his incarnation. Jesus came to conquer sin and death,⁴⁹ the distortions which had entered the world. If these things had been part of the original good creation, he would not have needed to conquer them. The presence of predators in the land is a manifestation the fallen world. It is not the hawk that is cruel, it is Satan. The deformed and defaced creation, what we call "*nature*," expresses that cruelty. It provides a distorted picture of what "good" is. It casts a shadow upon the image of God in creation, so that we see his character less clearly. The distortions of the creation have been arranged in a way which implies that the blame for the suffering should actually rest upon God. Yet Satan did not create anything in nature other than the suffering. As Jesus said, "the devil ... was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him ... he is a liar".⁵⁰

Satan is the interim ruler of this world. He took dominion over it from Adam by deception. In some ways the curse upon creation can be looked at as God allowing the Satan to change the ground-rules for the operation of the earth. It is therefore not surprising that the world is filled with the death of the innocent. Jesus did describe him as "a murderer from the beginning".

The whole concept of a natural cycle of birth and death has lead to an unscriptural idea that good and evil are in some sort of cosmic balance, peacefully co-existing since eternity. We look at death as a part of life. We accept the fact that nature's violent "acts of God" periodically disturb our comfortable and secure routines.

The "good life" in California co-exists with the San Andreas Fault and the threat of the "Big One". Such things are facts of life. Yet these "facts of life" can easily lead to a misinterpretation of reality. As Jesus told the Sadducees, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God ... have you not read what God said"?⁵¹ One of the reasons that God gave us his special revelation of the Bible is to show us those things that are not obvious in the world. They must be revealed to be understood.

THE CORRECT VIEW OF NATURE

People say that they are motivated to protect the environment out of a desire to do what is right. It is a noble goal to want to preserve God's creation. Yet do we really understand what God values in the creation? Are we acting out of love for God or out of a fear that there is no God?

In what ways has our modern view of nature caused our image of God to be distorted? Consider the way that we look at nature's relationship to God. Why do birds, who sing for joy at the dawn, also act so cautiously when they are on the ground to feed? Do they not trust the hand of the Father who has given them the seeds of the meadow for food? Do our children fear that when they expect us to put food on the table we might give them a snake instead?⁵² Of course not! If we can do these simple good things for our children, why would we expect less of our Father in heaven?

So then, why is there fear within nature? It is because these creatures understand better than we do that this is a fallen world. Every moment that they are in an unprotected place they are in danger. It is the same for grazing deer in a meadow by the road as it is for antelope in the nature preserve of the Serengeti. It is not just man that these creatures fear. They fear any creature that preys upon them for food.

As humans, we too fear illness and death. We fight every step of their advance. We further buffer ourselves from death by getting the meat we use as food from a supermarket in clean emotionless packages. Most people would consider it terrible to eat an animal that they have known. So we have developed an industry to raise and slaughter creatures for us so we can shield ourselves from the reality that a creature died so we could have food. Our culture tries to convince us that the world is a loving mother providing for us, when really we too are living a life and death struggle. We have arranged it so we only have to face that struggle when confronted with our own mortality or that of our loved ones. Even then, we try to make light of it and call it "*natural*".

What does the Bible say is man's place in the creation? The Westminster Shorter Catechism summarizes the chief end of man as being his relationship to God.⁵³ However historically, our view of man's place in nature has come from every perspective imaginable.

Some people have viewed themselves as travelers in a hostile environment. To them we are taming the savage wilderness in a kill or be killed struggle against beasts and the elements for food, shelter and warmth. Others consider us just another one of the animals, on par with the whales and porpoises in the evolutionary advance. To them, all creatures are brothers, with nature as our common mother. They feel it would be wrong for people to eat their brothers. Therefore, they are vegetarians out of conscience, not wanting to take the life of an equal, even though these creatures are "what nature has provided" as nourishment for the lion, the wolf and the hawk.

There are also those who consider the creation to be simply the storehouse of supplies for humanity. It is not uncommon to hear Christianity being accused of holding the view that "God planned (the creation) explicitly for man's benefit and rule; no item in the physical creation had any purposes save to serve man's purposes."⁵⁴ This line of thinking promotes nature as a resource given to man to be conquered and utilized. It causes people to see our use of the earth as a gift we inherited, rather than a covenantal leasing arrangement.

At the other end of the philosophical spectrum is the idea of humanity being the servant in, rather than owner of, the world. Taken to its extremes, in this perspective we are no longer allowed to use anything in nature's "house." We would simply dust the art works and be a nanny to all of nature, the real children of the house.

This is the point of view of those who see any actions we take as being destructive to the "sacred" balance of nature. Man to them has ceased to be an integral part of nature. Mankind is a weed, a disease.

So what our relationship to nature? Would it be proper to have us consider the creation to be "a commodity to be consumed, a candy store to be looted, ... resources to be ... managed on a maximum sustainable yield basis, a garden to be tended, or even a wonderland to be preserved"?"⁵⁵

OUR STRUGGLE TO TAME THE INHOSPITABLE LAND

The Bible says that the creation has been cursed because of our behavior. We struggle against nature. It is not our ally. By the sweat of our brow we must toil against thorns and thistles to raise our crops from the land.⁵⁶ Creation was once our tropical paradise to have dominion over. The Bible makes it clear that the fallen creation which we dwell in today is not the garden we were once given.

The world is full of inhospitable weather, treacherous terrains, predators, poisonous creatures and disease. Across most of the world, a person in the wilderness without proper protection against the elements and wild animals would soon perish. Though in "developed" countries most of the daily aspects of nature have been "tamed," we are still physically vulnerable. Though we walk on our suburban streets and hike in our forests, there are still many places on this planet where nature does not welcome us to just "go for a walk".

We are deceiving ourselves if we think that man or any other creature lives in "harmony" with nature. This is how Peter Marshall, in his book *"The Light and the Glory"* described the sickness experienced by the Pilgrims during their first winter in one of the initial European settlements in North America:

"When the worst was finally over, they had lost forty-seven people, nearly half their original number. ... compared with Jamestown's 80 to 90 percent mortality rate, they came through remarkably well."⁵⁷

The wilderness was inhospitable. We have forgotten these things as we inhabit these same locations in safe warm homes with an ample food supply provided by supermarkets.

To live in harmony with nature is one of the goals promoted by many who are active in the environmental movement. They envision North America as being occupied by noble Native Americans in balance with nature, before it was disrupted by Columbus. These indigenous peoples are depicted as hunter-gatherers living off the land, leaving no scar, pollution or disturbance in their wake. There is the sense that this simple idyllic life could have gone on forever, if it had not been contaminated by European culture with its materialistic greed and its concept of having dominion over the land. From this perspective, the numerous Indian nations are lumped together as a single culture which is imaged as considering the land a sibling to live beside. This is contrasted to the stereotype of the Europeans considering the land a resource to consume.

The film "Dances With Wolves" was effective in showing the careless destruction of nature by arrogant men. The wasteful Americans killed buffalo and only used the tongue and the hide, leaving the remaining hundreds of pounds of meat to spoil. For sport, the troops shot at Two Socks the wolf. It was certainly not a moment when hearts would swell with pride at being an American.

Although the Sioux Indians may have been better environmentalists than the Americans, we must be cautious before we conclude that they were a superior culture or lived by a superior ethic. Even this Hollywood depiction recognized that these were fallen men. They were at war with their neighbors, the Pawnee. Their young men stole from the outpost and would have killed the white-skinned immigrant had the judgment of older men not prevailed. This is really no different than the undisciplined American troops that were being portrayed. Yet it has become increasingly common to hear young comfortable celebrities expounding on how the Indians were living here in harmony with nature for thousands of years, and how there is a lot that we need to learn from them.

What do we know about these Native Americans and their impact on the biodiversity of the land they occupied? The fossil record indicates that there were numerous types of mega fauna, extremely large types of animals, present in North America during the Ice Age.⁵⁸ Immediately after the retreat of the glacier, when these peoples first arrived in North America, most of these large land animals became extinct. The disappearance of creatures like the woolly mammoth and the giant sloth is commonly attributed to over-hunting by the expanding human population, although climatic changes are likely to have contributed to the problem.

If it is the Aztec culture that is being fondly remembered, do not forget that these Native Americans in Mexico were living in a city exceeding one million people when the Spaniards encountered them. This is far larger than anything in Europe at that time. That does not seem consistent with "*living softly on the land.*"

If you envy the lives of the more nomadic groups, you find hunter-gatherer cultures with low population densities living in a subsistence economy, with little to protect them from the harshness of the climate around them. They were unable to expand as rapidly as the European settlers did later, and so in that sense these indigenous peoples had a sustainable economy. Still the idea that these people were living happy lives as noble savages in harmony with the land around them is just wishful nostalgia.

The idea that the Indians were pure, at peace and carefree is no different than wishing America was the home of Ozzie and Harriet again. We have the idea that the 1950s were a happier time without divorce, polluted rivers or urban decay. Each of these images are pointed to by pro-European or anti-European romantics to use as a focal point of what the good life could be if all the problems they see in the world were corrected. Both may be useful depictions, but neither is accurate. These images do not represent the real condition of the world we live in. Nature does not drop milk and honey in our laps. It did not in North America in the 1950s or 500 years ago. It did not in the land of Canaan 3500 years ago.

On a grand scale, the universe is a clock that is slowly winding down from its energy-rich, orderly state at its initial creation. Looking at the history of the world, this physical law holds true. Over time the resources around us are being depleted as they are used to meet our basic needs. The lushness dissipates. Natural systems can no longer sustain the same level of productivity, without depleting reserves. In its most basic form this concept is true even in the utopian "*sustainable economies*".

The resources which are utilized by our agriculture and industry are becoming less and less directly related to what we actually need. We burn fossil fuels because the environments that we inhabit are too cold to live in without shelter and the natural foods which require no cooking are scarce. In many places, the resources which once allowed people to live in small rural communities have been depleted, causing population to move to urban areas. Now that we are packed into cities that do not contain the resources to support our needs, we are forced to look to global markets for raw materials and to transcontinental shipping for food. We are even dependent on high-tech health care to sustain us in our depleted and fouled environment.

WHERE IS THE JOY IN EVOLUTION?

Although the world around us is no longer all that it once was, we still venture out from our cities to be "out in nature", nourished with a feeling of comfort and a sense of joy. We marvel as we stop to notice the complex structure of living things, or Spring's first flowers in bloom, or a bird on the wing. This is our reaction to seeing God's provision for us. We all have these emotions whether we acknowledge God or not.

Compare that sense of wonder with the nature programming which is common on television. There are pictures of intricacy and beauty, but inevitably it is portrayed as being in a "*balance*" with suffering and death. Have you ever felt a sense of satisfaction from a narration of our victorious ascent from the family of primates? Does the "truth" being taught about the coalescing of our solar system and the evolving of life out of the elements bring a sense of joy and wonder when you hear of it? Or rather do you feel a little depressed by the end of most nature programming after seeing the harsh reality of some panicked creature as it is wrestled down and torn apart?

I have yet to hear someone express that sense of awe in response to hearing the modern theories of how nature was supposed to have evolved. Shouldn't our "collective memory" be resounding with approval and pride? If our hearts know such pleasure in the creation, why does the satisfaction not carry over to what is supposed to be the story of its forming? Perhaps it is because our hearts can discern truth better than our minds. God has provided us with the heart of a steward. We take no comfort in seeing the things that have been placed in our care be subjected to suffering. Regardless of how many times we are told that the universe was created by random chance, it still does not evoke a sense of awe. This is because we know in our hearts that it is not true.

What harm has the rabbit who lives in the thicket done, or chipmunk living in the stone wall, that they should live an oppressed life fearing that any moving shadow may be a hawk? Has the Lord judged their wickedness, like he did Jerusalem in sending the Babylonians to carry them away? When the rains do not come and the meadow is not fruitful, have its creatures been weighed in the balance and been found in need of correction?

Obviously these questions are foolishness. We do not believe, and the Bible does not teach, that the violence being done to the creatures around us is the result of their own sinfulness. When tragedy strikes a fellow creature, the animals do not respond like Job's friends and wonder what evil deed that creature had done to deserve such an end. So then, how can we say that the good God to whom they sing has put these little ones in a position of constant fear as an expendable part of the food chain? Do we conclude that the world is a balance between good and evil, the yin and the yang, and God is only able to provide for his own by causing them to compete against one another? Do we wonder that although God knows when each sparrow falls, that he considers that sparrow expendable in order to feed the predator that pursues it? Do we start to question whether God is good? These are all things that have crept into our world view because, we do not know the Scriptures.

We can all tell that the place that we live in is not Eden. But we also need to be reminded that the "undisturbed" wilderness where creatures dwell in the absence of man is not Eden either. God did not place such fear in what he called "good" on the sixth day of creation. This world has been distorted by sin. Man's sin, not the sin of the chipmunk or the rabbit.

SCRIPTURE RATHER THAN NATURE REVEALS TRUTH

In the eyes of many, the environmental crisis is the result of people considering themselves to be separate from nature. As an expression of our desire to dwell peacefully with nature, we have created an image of what we would like the restored world to be. Earth Day posters depict the world as a place where porpoises and otters romp, eagles soar, lions recline, elephants bathe and leafy plants grow everywhere. All is gentle. All is innocent.

That is not a bad representation of Eden, yet it has very little in common with the world we live in today. Some involved in the environmental movement claim that their ideas about how we should live in the world represent the way to return to Eden. Forget waiting for the return of Christ. We don't have time to wait around for some ancient promise to be fulfilled. They tell us now is the time to take action and save the earth before it is too late. We just need to stop people from behaving in ways that are so destructive.

So why isn't Christianity jumping on that bandwagon? Why hasn't God lead his people to be more active in saving the planet? Isn't taking care of the earth a "godly" thing to do? Of course it is, but our problem has been that people still do not understand what it means to take care of the earth. The ideas I am presented here are strange to our ears in the Twentieth Century. The notion that the world is less than 10,000 years old is foreign to our scientifically "enlightened" minds. We do not picture nature as being fallen and deteriorating rather than advancing. The idea that man's heart and motives are evil, not good, is also strange to us. We have heard such ideas before, but weren't they just part of our culture's mythology?

Based on the facts that we have available, we try to understand the past by "inferring" what the world was previously like. How then should we deal with a written account of the historical events by someone who was there, if that account doesn't match our observations of the present? We could ignore it as unscientific and say that it was simply a primitive, uneducated interpretation of the same events we see today. We would be calling it an imaginative fable or a "*religious tradition*." We could then justify our giving it no standing in modern science.

In his book "*The Earth in Balance*", former Vice President Al Gore devotes an entire chapter to the spiritual component in environmental stewardship. He speaks of "the sacredness of creation"⁵⁹ and "an awareness that it belongs to God".⁶⁰ He then speaks about his "tradition", referring to his Baptist upbringing, but he speaks of it as one of many viewpoints in the "rich tapestry of ideas about our relationship to the earth"⁶¹ and the "wisdom distilled by all faiths"⁶². He, and most in the environmental movement, do not believe that God "reveals" himself through Scripture. Instead, they think that we "distill" our knowledge of God through nature.

What if one came defending the accuracy of what has been rejected as the Bible's mythology, and he could do things that our science had never observed before? Would we then modify our scientific theories to reflect this expanded view of reality? It was once inferred man could not survive traveling at speeds exceeding the sound barrier. That theory was changed once the jet engine allowed those events to be observed. When Christ came making withered limbs whole, calming the storm and walking on water, he was performing things outside what science observes today. He did those things while teaching that we have mistaken ideas because we do not believe the Scriptures.⁶³ How then can we continue to deny the truth of the things that he was teaching, unless we assume that Jesus did not actually do those things and the disciples were simply uneducated men?

The miracles and resurrection of Jesus were done as a verification of his authenticity, but we have discounted them as simply a religious tradition. We ignore it as Christian mythology which could not have happened the way unscientific minds recorded it, because our science says it could not have happened.

The Bible states that people who deny God's authority over his creation have no excuse:

"what may be known about God is plain to them ... God's invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made".⁶⁴

Yet in another place Paul writes, "how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?"⁶⁵ There is much about God's character that we only know through his revelation in the Bible. With science we can only see and measure what is tangible in the physical world today. We are left to speculate on the reason the world is the way it is. We can study nature all we want and never understand the injustice done to its creatures by those who were placed in stewardship over the creation. The Scriptures make it clear that we can know God exists through our observations of nature, but apart from what he has actually told us in the Bible, we can only speculate on what he expects of us.

The facts that we can see and measure today, are available to supplement the truth that we are given in Scripture. That is our foundation for understanding. It is only through God's revelation to us, the Bible, that we can be sure that we are applying these scientific "facts" onto a proper foundation of reality. It is the Scriptures and not nature that reveals this reality.

Those who are denying God's authority already know about him. They see him in his creation. Yet because they have been unwilling to hear the rest of what can be known about him, they do not thank him for being active as our sustainer. Instead, they treat him as an absentee landlord who is unable to intercede in his own creation.

WHAT WE WILL BECOME

With all this confusion and the exposure our culture has to evolutionary teachings and science fiction fantasies, many people have developed a world view centered around a sense that the world is undergoing a natural progression. Any concept that appears to be true, is inserted into this model of what is real.

An acquaintance of mine was discussing something he had heard concerning biblical prophecies on the end of the world. He speculated that the Second Coming of Christ was to be a quantum leap in evolution where humanity would be genetically altered to create a higher state of being. He sought to convert part of the Christian sense of the future into his own sense of reality. He was looking for hope that there would be a future. Yet he missed out on the anticipation that he would take part in it. It is not the generations to come in the next million years who will be changed. At the time of the Second Coming, those who are living on that day, and all who have come before them, will pass from mortal to immortal. As Paul observed, "We will not all die, but we will all be changed".⁶⁶

How will we be changed? What do people imagine we are "*evolving*" into? Will the human race one day escape from these temporal bodies and become one with the "*essence*" of the universe? That is the hope of many. Some people believe we are to be reincarnated over and over until we are sufficiently pleasing to God. Others hope that somehow their own being will continue into some form of after-life beyond this world. These ideas take the finality out of death and make it less frightening for people.

Consider what the Bible has to say on this subject:

"what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that ... we will be like him"⁶⁷

"With what kind of body will they come [in the resurrection]? ... What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. When you sow, you do not plant the body it will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat ... So will it be at the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown perishable, it is raised imperishable; ... it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. ... just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven."⁶⁸

You see, even our bodies have been corrupted, in that they are susceptible to decay and death. Death is the burden that Adam brought upon himself, his descendants and the creation. But, "When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then ... Death has been swallowed up in victory."⁶⁹ This is God's plan to "*clean-up*" the environment.

CHAPTER 10 WHY DOES GOD ALLOW ... ?

*"The Lord works out everything for his own ends
even the wicked for a day of disaster."
Proverbs 16:4*

THE PURPOSE OF SUFFERING

What are we to make of the pain and suffering that we see in the world around us? What purpose is there to the trials we experience? In his letter to the Jewish Christians who had been scattered throughout the nations, James offered a word of hope to make some sense out of it all. He wrote, "count it all joy when you experience trials of many kinds ... the testing of your faith develops perseverance ... that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."⁷⁰

When you look at your life, you will notice that the times of maturing and character growth have come during times of trial, not times of ease. The Bible assures us, "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial ... he will receive the crown of life that God has promised".⁷¹

You, like all other people, will share in the suffering of Christ who "learned obedience from what he suffered".⁷² In this process God will not give us more than we can bear. When adversity seems about to overwhelm us, we can find comfort in the promise that "Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear to dull to hear".⁷³ But he also will not allow us to remain immature. He loves his children and wants what is best for us.

Children in kindergarten must be reassured that even though their parents send them away, going to school is for their own benefit. They are not being punished. Similarly, we are being looked after. All our trials are allowed for our benefit and for God's greater purposes. God is able to use the corruption which has infected his creation to accomplish his own objectives. He did not cause this wickedness to infect the earth and he is not the one who puts these temptations before us. Yet, God has promised that persevering brings blessings which he has prepared for us. As Joseph said to his brothers, when they were afraid that he would take revenge for what they had done to him, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good".⁷⁴

The Book of Job describes it this way, "Who can understand how he [sends the rain and the lightning] ... This is the way he governs the nations and provides food in abundance. ... he does great things beyond our understanding".⁷⁵ Nature, with its blessings and its afflictions for man, is a tool which God uses to govern the nations. He rewards them and disciplines them with a wisdom that we can only begin to comprehend.

Since God is able to use the suffering that occurs in the fallen creation for positive purposes, the inevitable question is: what causes nature to be destructive? Are the forces of nature, and the destruction they cause, controlled by good or evil? Or are they simply responding inanimately through a mechanical cause and effect initiated at the beginning of time? If nature is not exclusively reacting to natural solar, lunar and geothermal forces to drive the weather and the shifting of the earth's crust, is nature directed by God or by Satan?

Satan is called "the prince of this world",⁷⁶ but he is not unrestrained in his ability to act. Satan had to ask that God's protection of Job be lifted before a mighty wind was allowed to collapse a house upon Job's

children.⁷⁷ This shows us that the prince of this world does not have unlimited control of nature. His ability to do harm is limited.

The destructive acts of nature are under God's control. A well-known example of God's intervening in nature are the plagues that came upon Egypt. The Psalmist tells it in this way:

"He turned their waters into blood, causing their fish to die. ... he struck down their vines and fig trees and shattered the trees ... He spoke, and locusts came ... they ate up every green thing in their land!"⁷⁸

There can be no doubt that the Scriptures attribute God to be the source of these plagues upon man and nature. He did not just set Satan loose. This destructive force upon both plant and creature was the work of God's hand and voice. The Psalmist agrees with this view, describing God as "he who looks at the earth, and it trembles; who touches the mountains, and they smoke."⁷⁹ The "force" itself is not God. It is the creation's response to his commands.

Consider also how Jesus rebuked the storm on the Sea of Galilee and it was stilled. He did not pray that the Father would refrain from administering the storm. Neither did he rebuke a demon, as he had done in many of the healings. Instead he commanded, "Be still!" Mark records their awe by stating, "Even the wind and waves obey him!"⁸⁰

TO SHOW US THAT WE ARE IN NEED

How can we begin to understand God's purpose in allowing, and sometimes directing, nature's forces to bring turmoil to the earth?

Jesus expressed the feelings in God's heart when he said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem ... how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! Look, your house is left to you desolate."⁸¹

There were inevitable consequences which Israel would suffer for turning away from God. In some ways, God is like a parent who tries to train his children and then must let them make their own decisions and make their own mistakes. By giving us free will, God also allows us to make foolish choices and suffer the consequences.

God's chastising us does not mean that he has abandoned his covenant with us, even if we have not done what was required on our part. In describing the Lord's enduring love, Psalm 107 illustrates how God's actions cause us to turn to him for help. Then as we see that he is able to watch over us, we become willing to trust in his care and seek his forgiveness.

"They saw the works of the Lord, his wonderful deeds in the deep. For he spoke and stirred up a tempest ... in their peril their courage melted away ... they were at their wits' end. Then they cried out to the Lord in their distress. He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed. They were glad when it grew calm ... Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love."⁸²

Don't fail to notice that the tempest is described as one of "his wonderful deeds in the deep." A purpose of it was to bring these men to "their wits' end". Literally translated, it confused all their wisdom. God proved to them that they were unable to be master of their own fate. God was pleased when they cried out to him in their distress. He was willing and able to respond to their turning to him for help.

Do not mistake God's disciplining his children as a suggestion that he entertains himself by tormenting his creation. He desires for us to turn from our path of self-destruction. Since we have free will but limited understanding, the only way we can be protected from the consequences of our poor judgment is to be dependent upon him. Times of trial point us back to God and away from our misdirected independence.

Another tempest is described while the disciples were on the Sea of Galilee. The story is recorded in Matthew chapter 8.

"A furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke him, saying, 'Lord, save us! We're going to drown!'"⁸³

They had expected him to ask the Father to do something, not to give commands to the tempest himself.

"He replied, 'You of little faith, why are you so afraid?' Then he got up and rebuked the wind and the waves, and it was completely calm."⁸⁴

The pattern is repeated. In their peril, men were distressed. They called out to Jesus, expecting that he could do something. In the psalm, the storm was calmed and the men praised God for his ability and willingness to care for those who turn to him. In the case of the disciples, the teaching was taken a step further. There were some expectations placed upon those who had already turned to God and were learning to walk in his ways. Jesus challenged their way of thinking, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?"

Being a follower of Jesus must include faith. Faith in the sense that we can overcome our fear by knowing that he cares for us. He is able to protect us from or through anything. Satan had to ask God before he could afflict Job. Without God's permission nothing can happen to you, or to anything else in the world. The storm, the bandits, the illness, all these things came upon Job, his family and the creatures under his care, only with God's approval. They had crossed God's desk and had been signed-off on as being consistent with his purposes.

There was a lesson being taught to the disciples in the midst of their fear. If they knew God was taking care of them and would give them what they needed if they asked him, why did they ask with such fear? If you already know that you are walking with him, even in times of trouble you can be at rest. Paul described it as, "being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion".⁸⁵

THE IDOLS WE SERVE

How would we apply this to ourselves today? "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Every destructive force within the fallen creation is limited by what God's greater good allows to occur. The storms and disease that devastate lives, the insects that destroy our crops and even the oil spills that kill fish and fowl are all according to his purposes.

In his book "*In the Eye of the Storm*," Max Lucado observed, "The God who lets me get frightened enough to need him and then comes close enough to see him. ... It took a storm for me to see him."⁸⁶ That is why we have the curse. We need to go through the storm.

The logical conclusion is that having the world be polluted is in his perfect will at this time. Even with so many creatures facing extinction and "nature" itself possibly being irreparably changed due to our irresponsible stewardship, God is still not worried. If the one who is perfect and holy is willing to allow such harm to his creation, there is an over-riding purpose.

In order to make his people dependent upon him, God made the Israelites slaves under Pharaoh. Similarly, he told the early church to be in subjection to their earthly rulers.⁸⁷ Then in each case, he showed that he was able to sustain and deliver his people when they were powerless to do it for themselves. In the same way God has not lost control of this world in the face of poverty, pollution and the destruction of ecosystems. He has his purposes, though we may not fully understand them.

In Egypt, the plagues, which came upon the land as Moses confronted Pharaoh, were an assault by God on the "gods" of the Egyptians. To say it a bit more simply, the Egyptians viewed themselves as being dependent on the natural world. The forces of nature that they were dependent on included the Nile, the sun, the weather, their health and the creatures around them. The plagues which God used to confront their world view polluted their water, blocked the sun's light, covered them with boils, struck down their animals and sent locusts to devour their vegetation.⁸⁸ By showing them that he could remove the blessing which each of these forces of nature had provided them, God proved that he was in control of nature. What the Egyptians had been putting their confidence in for their well-being, was actually something that the God of the Israelites controlled. Therefore, what today we would consider the "natural disasters" which came upon Egypt, should be looked upon as tools of instruction according to God's purposes.

The example which God has set in the past still applies today. Like Egypt under Pharaoh, we look at the world around us as controlling our fate. We worry about the thin atmosphere above us being the only thing separating us from the hostile environment of space. We see disease threatening our bodies. We feel dependent on the present weather patterns to sustain our crops.

Like he did to the Egyptians, God assaults what we are placing our confidence in. He will not allow false gods to steal the credit that he is due. God uses the events of the world to test his own people, to show whether they are dependent on him or on others. We will not be without adversity, because he uses these things to teach us to turn to him with our needs.

When we give our "rights" and expectations to God, as one who is all-wise, all-powerful and has promised to protect us, then we are freed from fear. The things that we worry about are threatening to us only because they are not under our control. It is through these times of trials that God reminds us that, in spite of our wealth and technology, we are completely dependent on his provision.

As portrayed in the letter to the believers in Laodicea, this is an attitude that God seeks to correct:

"You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. ... Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent."⁸⁹

The expected response to such correction is to take a serious look at yourself and to change your behavior. Our trials are referred to as by Jesus as his knocking at the door. If our response is to such trials is to admit our dependence on God, he promises: "I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."⁹⁰

Although we are in rebellion against his authority, we have God's assurance that he will care for those who sincerely seek him. God is true to his word. He is not like men, who will promise you whatever you want to hear and not be able to deliver. Consider the implications of his promises. It will calm your fears and give you contentment in what he has provided.

GOD'S VINEYARD

One aspect of our rebellion against God is our failure to thank him for what we have. We have become like ungrateful children who do not appreciate the efforts of their parents to provide for them. We have finely prepared food on the table each day, but are unaware that another has worked to provide and prepare it. Do our children thank the table or the plate for its generosity, never acknowledging the parent who provided the meal?

More than that, we are marveling at our own wisdom for knowing enough to come to the table and eat. We say to ourselves, if we just keep doing what we have been doing, then the food will keep coming to us. We just need to keep the table in good repair, keep the plate clean and use our wisdom to come to the table three times a day. Unfortunately, our efforts to maintain our table of the environment is not going to save us. It is not the plate of nature that is responsible for the bountiful blessing which we receive.

If we continue to lack a sense of gratefulness to our Father as we consume all that he has placed before us, how long will he continue to be so generous? At what point does a parent begin correcting such ingratitude? First, the correction is gentle, then with increasing firmness until the point is made. It might even come to the point where one day a meal is not provided on the table in order to remind the child that it was the parent giving the food. It is not the parent's intent to deprive the child or to starve him, but ungratefulness and misconceptions will ultimately result in an arrogant uncontrollable child.

Isaiah wrote a song about our ungratefulness to God our provider and how he responds when his efforts to correct us continue to be unfruitful. It was written as a love song.

"I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit."

"Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it."

"... he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress."⁹¹

God has a complaint against the people of the world. He gave us a place where we could thrive and bear the good fruit of acting justly, loving mercy and walking humbly with God.⁹² Yet over and over in the Bible's parables people are described as rebellious tenants who eventually have to answer for their behavior.

As you can see in the effects of God's removal of his protection from the vineyard, it was God that had been restraining the destructive forces that had been there all along. The judgment of God has not caused the environmental deterioration that we face. He has simply stopped preventing it from happening. God's hedge and wall were all that had kept out things that could overwhelm the vineyard. It was only his pruning that enabled the vines to be fruitful. An untended grape vine will not produce the number and quality of grapes as one would bear after it has been pruned back to encourage it to bear fruit. Otherwise the vine puts all its energy into growing larger. At the same time, it was God's cultivating that prevented the vineyard from becoming a "wasteland" overgrown with undesirable types of plants. Plus, it was only because he had sent the rains that anything could grow there at all.

What more could he have done?⁹³ The choice vine that he had planted in the fertile soil produced nothing of value, even though it had been cared for. The healthy "balance" that we see in nature did not get here by random chance. It was carefully prepared, planted and tended. God's hedge and wall are what have been protecting and sustaining his creation from these destructive forces all along.⁹⁴

Through Isaiah, God asks the question, why should he labor any longer to protect and sustain his vineyard when it is yielding such bad fruit? Would you work an orchard that yielded no profit? Would you tend a garden that produce only unattractive blossoms that give a foul odor? God had planted us as "the garden of his delight" but out of his garden he has only "heard cries of distress."⁹⁵

THE LIMITS OF GOD'S PATIENCE

In Jeremiah 13 our rejection of God is described from God's viewpoint:

"These wicked people, who refuse to listen to my words, who follow the stubbornness of their hearts ... will be like this [broken] belt - completely useless! For as a belt is bound around a man's waste, so I bound [them] ... to me ... to be my people for my renown and praise and honor. But they have not listened."⁹⁶

God is displeased by our behavior and so he has withdrawn some of his sustaining of our land. Our relationship to the land is dependent upon our relationship to God.

"Again and again I sent all my servants the prophets to you. They said, 'Each of you must turn from your wicked ways and reform your actions ... Then you will live in the land I have given to you and your fathers.' But you have not paid attention or listened to me."⁹⁷

Yet God has not lost interest in the world as if it were a failed project. He has not turned away from his creation, abandoning it like some contaminated, decaying factory. We have not been forgotten like a strip mall whose foreign owner lost interest when it ceased to be profitable. We are still God's vineyard.

Prior to Isaiah telling the parable of the abandoned vineyard,⁹⁸ the prophet pronounced a promise of restoration:

"In the last days ... He will teach us his ways so that we may walk in his paths. ... They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. ... the fruit of the land will be the pride and glory of ... Israel ... The Lord will wash away the filth ... Then the Lord will create a refuge and a hiding place from the storm".⁹⁹

God will not remain angry forever. He is seeking to have us return to him, rather than flee from him, both individually and collectively. But he has already tried to attract us with blessings and we ignored him. He has been patient with us, seeking to teach us, but we would not listen. What more could he have done to get our attention, short of spanking his rebellious children?

In another parable, Jesus described God's patience by comparing the unrepentant to a fig tree which year after year yielded no fruit, but only used up the soil:

"leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down."¹⁰⁰

We all deserve his punishment as a result of our lawlessness. If "all have sinned and fall short"¹⁰¹ and "the wages of sin is death,"¹⁰² why are we still alive? Paul described God's patience this way:

"you think you will escape God's judgment? Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance? But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath".¹⁰³

We have not been totally separated from God's sustaining power and cast out into the darkness. But we are storing up wrath against ourselves for the day when God's patience comes to its end.

Jesus used a tragic event of the day as an example of this.¹⁰⁴ Why did a tower collapse and kill 18 people? Were those people especially wicked? Jesus pointed out that all the unrepentant will one day perish. What they should really be asking is why it had not fallen on them instead. This is an indication of God's kindness, tolerance and patience, allowing us a grace period to see the error of our ways as he leads us toward repentance.

So then, God is tolerating a certain level of corruption to exist in his creation, so that some will repent and turn to him before our window of opportunity is gone. He tolerates the weeds to grow in the field with the wheat for a time, so as to not damage the wheat by pulling the weeds.¹⁰⁵ We need to remind ourselves that the effects of the curse that we see in our polluted world today are actually a sign of God's kindness. Evil is being tolerated for a time, because God has a purpose for even that.

"The Lord works out everything for his own ends - even the wicked for a day of disaster."¹⁰⁶

CHAPTER 11

WE ARE BEING DISCIPLINED

*"For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant;
later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness
to those who have been trained by it." - Hebrews 12:11 RVS*

WE EXPECT TO BE PUNISHED

If there is a good God in heaven, why is there such evil and suffering in the world? Isn't that the strongest case for believing that nature developed life through the random trial and error of evolution, rather than life coming from the hand of a loving Creator? After all, if this land of pollution, turmoil and bloodshed is the best he could give us, why shouldn't we conclude that God must either not be all-powerful or all-good. Even those who have no doubt that the Almighty is loving and good, still question why innocent people must suffer. It seems so inconsistent with the idea that God is good and his love endures forever¹⁰⁷ for the innocent to be afflicted by such widespread suffering.

The misconceptions in such questions stem from our point of view as creatures who are out of fellowship with God. When compared with their oppressors, the oppressed appear innocent, but there are actually no innocent people. In God's eyes we are all in rebellion. The difference between the powerful and the powerless is that they are undergoing different types of discipline.

The people of this world have rebelled against God's authority. We have ignored the laws he set in place to create the balance that was present in Eden. As a result, the world is now full of injustice and inequity as we compete for a diminishing supply of resources.

The Bible makes it clear that, "all have sinned".¹⁰⁸ We are all guilty. "There is no one who seeks good".¹⁰⁹ Like a genetic defect, we all have inherited from Adam the tendency to disregard what God requires of us. We have introduced an illness into God's creation. We have added the knowledge of good and evil¹¹⁰ to the freedom of choice originally given to us. We are free to choose do what is evil, and that is what we are prone to do. It should therefore come as no surprise that God allows us to face the consequences that we bring upon ourselves.

But are we really all that corrupt? We don't envision ourselves as being sinister. Don't you picture yourself as one of the "good guys?" You try to do your best. You've never done anything "really" bad. So what is the problem? Think about that for a moment. By our nature, we try to stretch the rules. For example, the speed limit is frequently lower than we consider reasonable or convenient, so we stretch the rules. Then our hearts pound when we drive past a police car and wonder if they were watching. In dozens of other ways we have pressed our luck by "bending" the rules. We are a people who have been looking over our shoulders since childhood to see if we will get caught. We are waiting, expecting to have to answer to someone. We know we are not as good as we could be. We just wonder if we have been bad enough to get punished for it. When things go wrong, if we get ill, have a string of unexpected expenses or lose a loved one, we automatically think we are being punished, because we know we've got it coming.

A FATHER DISCIPLINING HIS CHILDREN

We confuse being pressured to change our behavior with being doomed under the judgment of God. We all remember being disciplined by our parents when we were disobedient. Our parents corrected us out of love, because they knew that left to ourselves we would become spoiled brats. This is the way children are trained to have self-restraint. A parent's disciplining of a child is meant to protect the child from a greater danger that their continued misbehaving would ultimately lead to. For example, young children do not yet understand that playing in the road will eventually hurt them or that lying destroys relationships. So a parent must take steps to change the behavior before it becomes deeply ingrained in the child. The correction is in proportion to the severity of the challenge to the parent's authority.

In a similar way, God our Father, chastens and corrects us. The scolding that we receive is not inflicted upon us by God in some fit of frustration. Our Father gives us what he knows we need to protect us against things we do not yet understand. As a loving father, he trains his children so we will grow to be wise and mature. Is a pre-schooler not spanked or sent to his room for willful disobedience? Does the behavior of a spoiled child delight a parent?

God is like a parent who tries to instruct his children and then must let them make their own decisions and their own mistakes. In giving us free will, God also allows us to make foolish choices and to live with the implications of our choices.

Think about how as a child you were not always allowed to have your way, you were disciplined. As adults we are not that different. We still want to have our own way. In our roles as employees and spouses, we learn what types of conduct are appropriate. As members of society, if we break the law through our lack of self-restraint we are punished. God has put us under an authority structure that places government in the position to maintain law and order. As Paul taught, authorities "do not bear the sword for nothing".¹¹¹ You don't hear people saying that God has judged someone when that person is convicted and sent to jail. It is punishment that the law of the land considers just.

Many states call the agency in charge of the prisons the "Department of Corrections." It is called this because historically the goal of prisons has been to "correct" behavior. Society was not giving-up on these people, locking them away for life and throwing away the key. Yet today we no longer trust ex-convicts, if we ever did. We don't believe that people can repent and change their ways. This concept of restoration has been lost today. Prisons are viewed as a way to keep criminals off the streets. That is why we get so upset when a violent felon is let out of jail. Long sentences and the death penalty are pointed to as deterrents because once a person has "*turned bad*" society assumes there is no hope for them. Those who threaten the safety of others are to be removed from the society they prey upon.

People no longer believe that punishment can correct a person's motivation. What does this say about our understanding of repentance and our own ability to respond with forgiveness? Do we even believe that our failings can be forgiven by God? Do we dare to pray, "Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors"?¹¹²

WE NEED TO BE REMINDED

In order for us to grasp that we need to change our behavior, God must first get our attention. He does this through disciplining us. If we have never known anything but a bountiful harvest and a healthy economy, it is unlikely that we will be aware that God is protecting and sustaining us. A teenager who has never been in need and never had to work for what he has would have no way of knowing how good he has it. When we see that even our basic sustenance is not guaranteed, we realize our dependence on God. Until we become unemployed, we are not likely to be grateful to have the opportunity to go to work on a Monday.

We forget that when Israel was well fed in the land of milk and honey, they took what they had for granted and forgot their dependence on God. God sends oppression to correct our error. But too often when we receive God's correction we further rebel. We deny that God exists because he is not acting like the gentle, generous God we had expected. Or we feel that he is not trustworthy because he does not only send us things that we want. Like children who do not understand, we think our Father should only feed us candy and ice cream.

Even the lessons we do learn are too often soon forgotten. If we are quick to forget what we learn from our own experience, it is no surprise that we are forgetful concerning the knowledge handed down from those who came before us. Though we are able to learn from their experience, we must be repeatedly reminded. This is what the Psalmist was saying in Psalm 78:

"things we have heard and known, things that our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord ... which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children ... [so that] they would put their trust in God".¹¹³

I am presenting these ideas to you as a way to further that scriptural imperative, because later in that psalm the cost of not doing this becomes apparent:

"[they] refused to live by his law. They forgot ... the wonders he had shown them ... they kept on sinning; in spite of his wonders, they did not believe. So he ended their days in futility and their years in terror."¹¹⁴

Remember, this was Israel being referred to here. People who had been raised hearing his promises and warnings should have known better. Over and over the writers of Scripture remind us of the miracles God performed to lead Israel out of Egypt in the full view of the entire nation. The Bible says we need to be reminded of God's ability and faithfulness. That is why the Psalms repeatedly use narratives of their history to remind Israel of God's guidance and care. We have been warned to teach our children the things that God has done in the plain sight of men. This is because people remember through repetition. Moses instructed the people to teach their children about God. They were to pass on the account of what their forefathers had experienced because others would not have the opportunity to see these things first hand.

God is not asking us to blindly believe some fable. The Bible is the written history of God's intervening in his creation. This account of how he has made his presence known through by-passing the laws of nature has been affirmed, preserved and handed down for more than 50 generations.

This same theme of our tendency to be forgetful is highlighted in the New Testament by the angel speaking to the women at the empty tomb. "Remember how he told you".¹¹⁵ Similarly, as the disciples

were distracted over their having forgotten to bring food as they traveled, Jesus said, "Do you still not understand? Don't you remember the five loaves for the 5,000; and how many basketfuls you gathered?"¹¹⁶ That is just it! We don't remember without applying effort. We consider history irrelevant to our lives today, but in doing that we expect God to prove himself to each of us all over again. As Jesus told Thomas:

"Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen yet have believed."¹¹⁷

No wonder we worry and live fearful lives. We don't remember how God has provided for us in the past. Though he even clothes the wild flowers and feeds the young birds, still we toil and worry over things he has already promised us. Don't forget Paul's exhortation to the Philippians to remember to rejoice in the Lord rather than being anxious about many things.¹¹⁸

A GUILTY CONSCIENCE

Why do we worry? God has told us he will care for us, but we grow anxious over such promises when we cannot see where his provision will come from. We live by the motto, "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." We would rather trust our own ability to provide for ourselves than wonder whether God might have disowned us because he is displeased with us.

We know the rebellious things that we have done those times when we have decided to not restrain ourselves. We are aware of the mistakes we have made, but we deny our guilt. Yet we only succeed in deceiving ourselves. We become talented at burying our conscience and blaming our feelings of guilt on the "distorted" teachings of our forefathers. We no longer consider our conscience to represent the universal truths that are written on our hearts.¹¹⁹ Modern thought considers the conscience to represent cultural traits which restrict our behavior and bend our free will. Today we are being taught that nudity, adultery, homosexuality, and a whole variety of other "moral" issues are not wrong, only improper in the context of historical teachings of certain cultures. These moral issues which our consciences struggle with will supposedly go away with proper education. What some consider proper education, Scripture calls searing the conscience¹²⁰ and hardening the heart.¹²¹ According to the Bible, these moral teachings are not learned, they are divinely implanted.

But God will not let us hide in peace. David described living with a guilty conscience this way:

"When I kept silent, my bones wasted away ... For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer."¹²²

Our source of vigor and health is wasting away. This is the cause of the illnesses we face. This is the reason our land becomes less fertile, the rains fail to come, heat and cold oppress us and "pests" compete with us for our crops. Our strength is being sapped.

The curse is a progressive disease. To some extent over the centuries, each generation has accepted the deteriorated environment passed down to them as health and prosperity. Therefore, God has allowed nature's resources to continue to erode so that each generation will sense the "wasting away." We go from bounty to want. We have gone from Eden to the thorns and thistles of the still lush pre-Flood world. From that lushness, the earth was reduced to the rockiness and storms of the post-Flood world. Since that time, we have seen climate changes, including an Ice Age. The well-watered valleys of the Middle East have been made dry. Tropical Africa has been scorched by centuries of drought. The forests of Europe

have been cleared. The soils of America and Russia have been eroded, paved and chemically poisoned. "Moth and rust" are consuming our wealth, causing our money to vanish as a result of inflation and failing investments. These are all chastisements that God has sent to correct us.

The Bible shows us how in the past, God has used nature as a tool to correct and discipline mankind. Yet we forget the Bible also says that "I the Lord do not change."¹²³ Why is it that today we look at what is happening to nature and feel that things are out of control? Does God no longer work through nature? Is God not the same as he was yesterday when the Bible describes him as using nature to instruct people?

According to the Bible, what should be our response to these leadings of God? Look at how God lead David to resolve his internal struggle later in Psalm 32:

"Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity ... and you forgave the guilt of my sin. ... Rejoice ... be glad ... sing, all you who are upright in heart."¹²⁴

When our rebellion ceases, so does the wasting away. The work of our hands becomes more fruitful. The joy in our heart more full. Our satisfaction with what has been provided to us is restored.

"to accept his lot and find enjoyment in his toil - this is the gift of God ... God keeps [that man] ... occupied with the joy in his heart."¹²⁵

"Many are the woes of the wicked, but the Lord's unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him."¹²⁶

CHAPTER 12

WHY MUST THE CREATION SUFFER?

*"the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. ... the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth."
Romans 8:21-22*

CURSED IS THE GROUND BECAUSE OF YOU

Why did God curse the creation, when it was mankind that failed to obey him? Why was nature forced to bear the burden? If man sinned, shouldn't it be man that is punished for his own failings and the rest of the creation spared being penalized? If God is so good, why all this talk about a curse?

Have you ever considered these issues? There are those who feel that God could not possibly exist because of the suffering in the world and deterioration of "the Garden." They say:

A God who is all-powerful would not have let this happen to his creation. Why doesn't he stop those who are making war against the helpless? Why are corporations and governments allowed to do such harm to nature? Why are so many starving in lands filled with drought and disease? How can you believe in a God that would allow these things to happen? Your religion is fine for you, but don't expect me to be interested in it!

In the years of war and famine that preceded Israel's captivity in Babylonian, the prophet Jeremiah was confronted with the same type of questions. This is how the Bible records his struggle with these issues:

"O Lord, ... I would speak to you about your justice: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease? ... How long will the land lie parched and the grass in every field be withered? Because those who live in it are wicked the animals and birds have perished."¹²⁷

Just as we do now, even 2500 years ago Jeremiah asked why it seemed that evil was not being punished and why nature was allowed to suffer. Even in that day, there was concern over the injustice of an ecological crisis. This was how God responded to the prophet's complaint:

"I will forsake my house ... I will give the one I love into the hands of her enemies. ... Many shepherds will ruin my vineyard and trample down my field; they will turn my pleasant field into a desolate wasteland ... the whole land will be laid waste because there is no one who *cares*. ... They will sow wheat but reap thorns; they will wear themselves out but gain nothing. So bear the shame of your harvest".¹²⁸ [Emphasis added]

The land was unable to sustain its habitats as a result of the people's own behavior. God said he would discipline them until they remembered that it was he who had provided them with the good of the land.

God confronted them concerning their dependence on others, rather than him, in their times of need:

"Do any of the worthless idols of the nations bring rain? Do the skies themselves send down showers?"¹²⁹

"this time I will teach them my power and might. Then they will know that my name is the Lord."¹³⁰

Instead of showing them that he could provide blessings as he had done so many times in the past, God now showed them that he could also stop providing them with these blessings. God has said he will abandon those who do not "*care*" and do not acknowledge that he lives. He allows the pleasant field of those whose hearts are far from him to "be made into a wasteland, parched and desolate". As a consequence of the faithless living at ease, in due time the land will fight against them. They will have thorns for a harvest and the animals will perish from the land. Sort of sounds familiar, doesn't it?

If that was how the law of cause and effect worked in Jeremiah's day, it is no surprise that these conditions are also present in our day. Our expanding technology is giving us even greater opportunities to over-work and misuse the land. Therefore, it should not be unexpected that God's withdrawal of his blessings and our own misuse of what he does provide have resulted in ecological devastation.

God will punish arrogance in his own way. He withholds the fruitfulness of the land to cause us to return to him. The prophet Jeremiah observes:

"The ground is cracked because there is no rain in the land; The farmers are dismayed and cover their heads; Even the doe in the field deserts her newborn fawn because there is no grass."¹³¹

Yet God's judgment also comes with a promise:

"after I uproot them, I will again have compassion ... if they learn well the ways of my people ... then they will be established among my people. But if any nation does not listen, I will completely uproot and destroy it," declares the Lord."¹³²

The curse was placed on creation to point people back toward God. The blessings of natural resources are distributed by God to sustain us, but they are also withheld when and where appropriate to teach, correct and rebuke us for our behavior. When you think about it, in this context the curse on creation makes sense.

In questioning why the earth was impacted by the Fall, we wrongly assume that man is primarily a part of nature. The view that people commonly hold tells them that we are on equal standing with the creatures, the forests, the land and the sea. Groups advocating animal rights or land preservation may consider their causes on par with, or even more enduring than, the rights of individuals or groups of people. But I have found no biblical basis for the viewpoint that mankind is merely an equal partner with any other part of the creation.

NATURE IS GOD'S TOOL TO CORRECT US

We must be careful to not ignore the clear teaching of the Bible in our perception of reality. Nature is our home, our work place, our joy and our responsibility. Yet at the same time nature is God's tool for teaching his children. We are the students. It is the classroom. Repeatedly, the Bible points to the numerous occasions when God used the forces of nature to remind us of our dependence on him and the things that he has provided. Attacks by wild animals, plagues of insects, disease, the withholding of rain and even earthquakes are the tools God uses. The Bible interprets all events, from fruitful harvests to corrupt leaders, as being interwoven into God's guiding, correcting and rewarding groups of people. If a modern writer tried to make such a correlation, he would be accused of over-interpreting history, yet this is exactly what the Bible consistently says.

We are being spanked. The implement with which a child is spanked has done nothing wrong. But it does not have the right to not be part of the disciplining or to not be struck the same number of whacks that the child is spanked. In support of this perspective, the Bible reminds us that our human character needs correction as part of our training.

"No discipline seems pleasant at the time, ... however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."¹³³

One example of God's making his control of nature visible occurred in the time of Elijah.¹³⁴ The Lord caused a three and a half year drought as a consequence of the evils which Ahab did as king of Israel. Elijah the prophet was the vehicle which God used to describe to the leaders of the nation why this was happening. This was not just an over-interpretation of natural events resulting in our personifying nature. God verified Elijah's authority to speak for him by having Elijah's public prayer initiate both the first and the last day of the prolonged drought. God also provided literal fire from the sky with pinpoint accuracy to make clear his endorsement of Elijah in the midst of all the others who claimed to be speaking for God.

Another account of nature as a tool in God's hand is found in the story Joseph.¹³⁵ God caused Pharaoh to place Joseph, a foreigner, in a position of authority over the government of Egypt. Under Joseph's leadership Egypt would store the surplus of its seven years of bountiful harvests in preparation for the seven years of drought and crop failures which had been forewarned. This supply of food was enough to sustain both Egypt and Israel through the famine. God intervened to show his wisdom and his power, but notice how. Although he could have stopped the drought, he did not. Instead of preventing both man and nature from being exposed to adversity, God chose to sustain those nations through the adversity. Again, the Bible is telling us that God's hand can be seen in ecological events. Nature is often the instrument which God uses to get our attention.

The Bible reminds us that God, as the Creator, has the authority to manage the creation as he sees fit. God said through both Moses and Paul:

"I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."¹³⁶

"For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: 'I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.'"¹³⁷

The objective of the plagues upon Egypt was to display the fact that both man and natural systems rise and fall at God's direction and for his purposes. We tend to see the general instability of climate as a sign that God is unwilling or unable to control the creation. In fact, just the opposite is true. An over-riding purpose for God's creation is to display his the character and ability.

THE COST OF OUR NOURISHMENT

The detachment of our modern lifestyles from nature has filtered out much of what we could learn about God from his creation. Our urbanized industrial culture is no longer intimately involved with the environment. To us, nature has been conquered and we are occupying the subdued frontier. We have our pets and our bird feeders. We hike in our local conservation areas and watch nature programs on television. But in all this we have isolated ourselves from involvement in the world that God has placed us in.

When my wife and I moved from the suburbs onto a small farm, there was some question about how hard it would be emotionally to raise poultry for our own meat. Like most everyone else we knew, we ate chicken that had been prepackaged in a supermarket. It was recognizable as food at that point, rather than as a living creature with physical needs.

Could we kill our own animals as food? Could we eat the creatures that had been under our care? To anyone reading this who was raised on a farm, those questions may seem a bit silly. At the same time, to anyone who has not farmed or hunted, the idea will make them uncomfortable.

Just look at how many people have no exposure to where their food comes from. Who of us would not feel squeamish about eating an animal that we had known. It becomes too personal, too cruel. We would rather keep that reality at a safe distance.

Dealing with death makes us uneasy. It should. The creation suffers before our eyes in the life and death struggle of nature's "balance." It shows us the scars our behavior has caused in bringing the curse upon the land. After reading Jesus' expounding on the Ten Commandments in Matthew chapter 5, we can see that we only consider ourselves good because we set our standards so much lower than God's standards. As John wrote, "If we claim we have not sinned, we make him [God] out to be a liar".¹³⁸ Our behavior has caused us to be alienated from God. There is a penalty that we must pay for our willful rebellion against our Creator's authority. We must somehow make restitution. But what is left for us to do once we have been found guilty of treason on a cosmic level?

The Law, which God gave to Moses, specified that animal sacrifices could be used to defer the punishment for our disobedience until a permanent solution was made available.

Today, the animal sacrifices which God required of Old Testament Israel seem so brutal and primitive. How could someone possibly justify killing an innocent animal to appease an angry deity? That makes no sense to modern sensibilities. We envision God as a loving Father who is kind and nurturing to all his creatures. Certainly God does not take pleasure in seeing his creatures die?

We look at this as cruel, bloody and barbaric, yet we do the same to get meat from our grocery stores, only we keep ourselves detached from it. Death is a reminder of the cost of our rebellion has had upon ourselves and upon the creation that was placed under our care. It is no mistake that we are saddened to see a sparrow fall or to see a predator make a kill. Nature was not supposed to be that way.

God required the Israelites to take a year old lamb from their flock take care of it for four days and then kill and eat it as the Passover lamb.¹³⁹ Do not miss the importance of the subtle requirement here. If the lamb was taken from the flock four days before it was to be eaten, what does it mean to "take care of" it. An alternative translation for this Hebrew phrase (*hayah l mismeret*) could be "to care for" or "be responsible for" it. Literally, they were being told to take it home and allow it to be a family pet for four days before they ate it. Why would God ask them to do something so repulsive? Was he trying to break

their spirits? People are wired so that this makes us uncomfortable, but that was intentional to remind us that this is a fallen world. Something has to pay the penalty for our continuing to break God's rules. Our rebelliousness has a cost.

If, as some assume, man has been a meat-eater from the beginning, why this squeamishness? To make some sense of this, consider that the Bible says at one time all creatures were nourished simply by eating plants.¹⁴⁰ So why are we no longer like that? First, there was the Fall of man and the subsequent curse which introduced decay into the world. Then later nature's lushness was diminished when the judgment of the Flood brought significant changes to the earth's climate. As part of God's disciplining us, he has been progressively removing more and more of the creation's original bounty. Today many creatures, including man, have been reduced to eating other creatures as food in order to sustain life.

What are the implication of this fact? If the death of creatures at the hands of man was not part of what God had intended, why would he have required that Adam's son Abel perform animal sacrifices from his flocks? Why would God later require the temple sacrifices and burnt offerings as part of the Israel's religion? Why would a destructive act be required as part of worship? Isn't killing part of the creation something that God would oppose, rather than require? Today, and no doubt even then, the death of innocent creatures is repugnant to us.

THE PRICE OF OUR REBELLION

Scripture makes it clear that prior to the coming of the Messiah, the death of an animal was an important part of man's mending his broken relationship with God. A price had to be paid for our disobedience. This was apparent from the moment the creation was cursed. There was a cost when God provided clothing for Adam and Eve to replace their own attempt to cover themselves with fig leaves. An animal from among the creatures under Adam's care had to die to provide the garments of skin. Later God required animal sacrifices by Adam's decedents as sin offerings and fellowship offerings. What is the purpose of all these animal sacrifices which the Old Testament required?

Hebrews 11:4 says, "By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did." Both were seeking to make their peace with the God that their parents had walked with in Eden. The obvious difference between the two brothers' actions was that Abel offered an animal sacrifice, while Cain offered the fruit of his fields. Both were giving back to God what God had entrusted to them.¹⁴¹ Yet since the penalty which God had specified for disobedience was death, they were both presuming that God would accept something less than the death penalty. Why would one offering be acceptable and not the other? What about Abel's offering caused it to be described as being "by faith"?

Years later, the Law of Moses indicated that animal sacrifices were required as an act of repentance for our rebellious behavior which had broken our relationship with God.¹⁴² The Letter to the Hebrews describes this principle further saying: "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness."¹⁴³ Based on that understanding, Abel had offered a lamb to die in his place.

But the Bible does not teach that an animal sacrifice can make a lasting peace with God. It can not change the fact that our hearts continue to challenge God's requirements of us. Instead David reminds us, "the sacrifices of ... a broken and contrite heart ... you will not despise."¹⁴⁴ Like the hides that replaced Adam's fig leaves, these sacrifices were the temporary method provided by God to cover over the guilt of our rebellion until a permanent atonement was made. The animal sacrifice was a foreshadowing of the solution that God himself would be providing.

That lamb was not guilty of anything. It was sacrificed "by faith" as a symbol which acknowledged that God alone could provide the proper way for people to receive his forgiveness. The necessary penalty did have to be paid before there could be a restoration of fellowship between a holy God and a corrupt humanity. God would provide the method by which we would not be expelled from his presence for our rebellion, without having him compromise his own integrity. When the death penalty is man's idea, it is typically out of revenge. But when the death penalty is God's idea, it is part of his perfect justice. We are all on "death row" for the mutiny which we have played a part in.

Remember how God had told Abraham to surrender his son Isaac as a sacrifice, but then provided him with a ram to be sacrificed as a substitute for his son.¹⁴⁵ God allowed the sacrifice of sheep and bulls to temporarily substitute for the death penalty that we were under for our treason. These things point toward Jesus, the Christ or Messiah, the lamb of God who died in our place.

POINTING US TO THE MESSIAH

In describing the hollowness of Israel's insincere ceremonial worship, God said through Isaiah:

"I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats."¹⁴⁶

God is not a blood-thirsty ruler that requires we entertain him. The purpose of the sacrifices was to cause us to see the impact of our own wickedness. The death of the animal was not the goal. The humbling of the rebel was. To God, causing his rebellious children to feel remorse was worth the cost of shedding the blood of some of his creatures. God is using these things to warn us, quite graphically, that our ignoring his requirements will not be taken lightly.

Jesus himself provides a useful example to help us understand the cost of our rebellion. Descriptions of Jesus after the resurrection indicate the scars of his wounds remained on his body both on earth and in heaven. Why would these imperfections remain in the "glorified" body of the one who made heaven and earth? Certainly God could have removed some scars while he was "making everything new".¹⁴⁷ The significance of the wounds is that they are a reminder for all to see of the cost paid to redeem lost humanity. Because "he who has been forgiven little loves little",¹⁴⁸ such a scar in heaven will serve to highlight for us how great a price God was willing to bear for us.

This is an imperfect, yet useful, example of why not just man but also the creation suffers under the curse. This scar upon Eden, now continually before our eyes, is a reminder of the consequences of our rebellion.

For a time God allowed the blood of the temple sacrifices to cover over the guilt of our rebellion. They pointed to the death of the Messiah which was still in the future. The animal that was sacrificed in the temple or the animal that is now meat on our table is paying the short-term cost to sustain us. The hesitation we have in killing animals for food points to Christ. Every time we take nourishment, it is a reminder of our dependence upon our Father who provides us with our "daily bread." We need to be reminded that our relationship to God was restored at great cost to God and his creation. That pet of a Passover lamb is a picture of the price God took upon himself in our place by sacrificing his son as the Messiah.

CHAPTER 13 GLIMPSES OF EDEN

"The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth". - Genesis 9:2

IS NATURE AGAINST US?

In a story in Newsweek¹⁴⁹ presented the threat to humanity of staph bacteria which could mutate to become immune to our antibiotics. It was feared that as we kill off the bacteria in our bodies which are susceptible to antibiotics, the bacteria which will become dominant are the ones which are resistant. A concern was expressed that we would be left helpless to face plagues, the likes of which the world has never seen. The article lamented the apparent inadequate level of antibiotic research in recent years, pointing to our lack of foresight as the reason for our present vulnerability.

How sad it is to see the fear and lack of understanding that people have concerning their future. They have learned little from the past. All they believe in is the random chance and natural selection. They have been taught that these processes have brought us to where we are today. If that was all we had to trust in, I would be scared too.

But let's look at some of the historical facts. The world is working under the same rules now that it has for thousands of years. The plagues which have struck over those centuries have killed many, but humanity has survived and prospered. Now with the help of medicines and hygiene, the infectious diseases of the past, typhoid, polio, small pox, scarlet fever and the others have been reduced to obscurity. Why should we fear that the "random" mutation of microbes would now cause mankind to lose at what some perceive as the cosmic game of chance we call evolution? Aren't we all supposed to have lasted through millions of years of beneficial mutations? Have the forces driving evolution suddenly become untrustworthy?

The absurdity with this perspective is that if mutation was as random as people have assumed it is, some microbe would have wiped us all out long ago. The fear those medical specialists have today confirm that to be true. If there was chance for the ultimate killer germ to mutate into being, why has it not yet happened? Each day of the assumed billion years since life was first formed, countless billions of bacteria each have propagated countless generations. The fact that mankind still exists, or exists at all despite those odds, implies that there is design within nature, not just randomness.

So then why are we still here? Many have come to believe that the fallen creation we dwell in, what we commonly call "*nature*," is a friend "*co-existing*" with man. Such an attitude of being at peace with a benevolent world is inconsistent with the facts. Though it is beautiful, bountiful and inspirational, nature is also violent and merciless to those in the path of its fury. For much of the world, life is not about a peaceful co-existence with nature, it is a struggle against the unpredictability of nature just to survive. The farmer wondering if crops will fail this year due to flood, drought or pestilence is perfectly aware of that. The person in the suburbs whose concern about weather is what to wear when they go outside has lost that awareness.

We have accepted that as part of "*the balance of nature*," predators stalk and kill prey at most levels of the food chain. Pain and suffering are inflicted by the animal kingdom on the animal kingdom just for its

survival. We do not question this. We cannot imagine a world where animal populations could remain at stable levels solely based on a dependable food supply of vegetation. The world, as we know it, has an ecological balance based on predators, with natural disasters periodically modifying the balance. This ruthless survival of the fittest in nature is all our experience has ever known.

Consider the effects that nature has upon us as it "peacefully co-exists" with us. It is nature that creates the radon which is a leading cause of lung cancer. It silently poisons those who are being responsible stewards by having energy-efficient air-tight homes. It is nature that unleashes hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, and volcanoes. Sub-zero blizzard conditions and scorching desert heat existed long before civilization became industrialized to the point of affecting climate. We cannot point to any of these things as impact caused by mankind's over-use of natural resources.

THE SEARCH FOR EDEN

So then what happened to the world which once had God's creatures living in peace and safety? Is that image simply our longing for something that never existed or are we searching for the Garden of Eden hoping that we might be accepted into it again?

The Bible teaches that we ourselves invited into the world the forces that have corrupted nature. Genesis chapter 3 describes the consequence of our rebellion in this way:

"Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life."¹⁵⁰

As a result of our being estranged from God, he has allowed affliction into this world. No culture will live a life of tranquility, contemplating the wonders of nature in a care-free, disease-free land. The curse fights against us with corruption and decay, sickness and death. Our desire to find relief from these things as we peacefully gather food from the forest and field will not be answered for more than a few passing moments for anyone in even the most pristine setting.

As part of this struggle for existence, there is an ecological equilibrium occurring. Many have mistakenly come to consider this "war zone" to be the eternally flourishing garden. "Eden" has become the term commonly used to refer to areas "*untouched*" by man, or at least areas where man has been limited to living in hunter-gatherer societies. Under this definition, Eden is considered to be nature unaltered by man's presence, essentially what the world was like before man was here.

They see this "*balance*" guiding the world from a primordial sea to a self-actualization of all nature somewhere beyond "*space the final frontier*". Men like Gene Roddenberry, the creator of Star Trek, desire to teach us their vision of humanity's hope being through the passing of centuries. The assumption being promoted is that there is something beneficial guiding the evolution of our species. They envision a parallel evolution going on throughout the universe. They are telling us that our hope for the future lies in time and random "*beneficial*" change. In their minds, all we need is enough knowledge and good-will to not cause our own extinction.

The Bible says something completely different. What people refer to as "*nature*" is not the naturally balanced environment which has allowed evolution to prosper for a billion years. Neither is it the perfectly designed "good" creation which God made for humanity. The good creation has been changed. It is still productive enough to support us, but as with the ants which Solomon commended in Proverbs

6:6, diligent work is required on our part to acquire our provisions. We compete with insects, blight, woodland creatures and weeds just to grow fruits and vegetables to put on our table. We chlorinate our water to kill disease. Then we filter our water and purify our indoor air to remove the pollution from the industries which are providing us with food and shelter. Even in our heated and air-conditioned, insect-free residences, we still are taken ill from viral and bacteria infections every year. We no longer reside in a land of ease. All this has happened in response to man's rebellion. God has placed an embargo of sorts on what the creation can provide us. He restrains our ill-conceived independence by imposing limits on the productivity and peace that the world can furnish.

GOD'S EXTRAVAGANT PROVISIONS

Our senses - sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell all can respond to the beauty of form and symmetry, tone and harmony and all the richness in scent and color in creation. Yet, around us we also see nature as scarred and battered amid the elaborate, complex design of the Creator. The lushness of Eden, the harmony of creation, the beauty of a summer day, those things have become tarnished, weathered and moth-eaten.

Because the world around us makes no sense, I prayed like the blind man in Mark 10, "Rabbi, I want to see". Then I glimpsed the world a bit more as God sees it. I saw the Grand Canyon as a garden destroyed. This huge erosional scar on the face of the earth is a reminder to us of the judgment upon our world. A barren, impassible ravine is cut into bare rock in a world where there once existed a lushness and bounty. The Grand Canyon is stunning to see, yet it is a stark reminder of the massive destruction of God's judgment on this fallen world.

How do we respond to this silent warning of God's fierce anger? We call these hundreds of square miles of rock devoid of soil a National Park for its vastness and wonder. We flock to it for its beauty. Even the destructive forces of nature are awe-inspiring. As in all that God does, it is vast, beautiful and breath-taking. God shows his majesty and extravagance even in the desolation that has come upon this world, whether in the bare rock of the Grand Canyon and Yosemite, or the frozen calm that follows a blizzard. The creation is magnificent, even in its fallen condition.

We sense our smallness and wonder at the world's complexity and magnitude. God has made it obvious that random chance could not have designed and constructed so elaborate and intricate a system. He has made his involvement in his handiwork obvious, yet still we fail to see his compassionate warnings to us with such obvious reminders.

We wonder at the beauty we see in creation and at the intricate and extravagant way the it all fits together. It is beyond what our hands could ever mold or our mind ever imagine. Their designer and creator shows us that the law of creation is not limited to competition, suffering for a brief time and then death. Through the creation God is blessing us with his favor. Just as God clothes the lilies, he also allows us to prosper, even as we are in rebellion against him. Our life is not only for the passing-on of our genes to future generations, as some joyless scientists would have us believe. If that were the case, the world could have been created colorless, merely in black and white. But our extravagant heavenly Father has provided us with so much more than that.

OUR ATTRACTION TO GLIMPSES OF EDEN

In the Spring of 1994, over one hundred thousand people were killed in the ethnic lawlessness in the African nation of Rwanda. The press did a good job of reporting to the outside world the inhumanity of the bloodshed and the shameless attitude of those committing the violence. One day's news was particularly insightful. National Public Radio provided their daily update of the horrors of war, then followed with a second story from Rwanda. It was an interview with a biologist who had escaped the violence, leaving behind her research of observing the silver-backed gorillas. These animals had been the subject of the movie "Gorillas in the Mist". She was discussing the threat that the warfare had for this endangered species. The thing that made this story especially intriguing was that the people involved had mentally screened out the violence of man against man as their hearts went out to the gorillas.

I found that two very different emotions were stirred by hearing that combination of stories. It angered me that the concern over an endangered species was being put on the same level as the concern over the suffering and death a hundred thousand people who were made in the image of God. But at the same time I could relate to the sense that these creatures were innocent victims dwelling beside fallen man. In some way that we cannot begin to understand, this war was one of the consequences of God's disciplining of humanity. It was simply a manifestation of the fact that "the wages of sin is death"¹⁵¹ and a reminder to the rest of us that we will all ultimately face that end.

What are we to make of emotions such as these? Even though according to the Bible humans are infinitely more valuable than this whole temporal world,¹⁵² still our hearts tend to go out to the helpless furry creatures. We are attracted to their innocence. Have our priorities become skewed when we worry about creatures rather than people? Or does this sense of concern stem from our role as caretakers of the creation?

When we look at an infant, we are struck with the wonder and beauty of it. Whole groups of people will say "awe" almost in unison. The child is without guile or malice. It needs us. Yet, in the same circumstances, if that had been an adult that we were looking at, I have yet to see anyone respond by "ooohing" and "awing". Obviously something has changed in our response to that infant once it has grown.

A similar response can be seen in our reaction to nature. We find great joy when we experience new life in all its innocence. Cubs, kittens, and puppies produce a child-like response in us. They are soft and warm, inquisitive and full of wonder. But in the presence of the adult bear, cougar or pit bull which that new-born will grow to be, our reflex response is not one of joy in our hearts. It is one of fear for our safety. What those creatures grow to become is no longer something that brings out our innate sense of caring for the things which God placed under Adam's care. Both cub and bear are part of nature. Why the different response? One is a sign of hope and innocence. The other is an unpredictable threat to our safety.

In southern Australia, there is a park where a million people a year go to have the chance to be close to a small bred of penguins as they make their daily trip from the sea to their evening nesting place. We travel great distances in order to experience being close to nature, especially the beautiful, non-threatening creatures who will allow us to be present in their habitat without fleeing from us. We love to see whales and seals and to have the birds be willing to come to our feeder.

What is the meaning of all this? Some say we want to feel like a part of nature again after having left it spiritually to build our cities. Yet there is more than that going on here. We want the animals to trust us and not flee from us. We also want the animals to stay non-threatening. The emotion we are remembering is not our being part of nature. If that were the case we would not love the off-spring of

predators which supposedly had caused us generations of pain and suffering as we "*evolved out of the trees*." Instead these emotions are a reminder that these creatures, like the innocent baby, were once under our care as part of the dominion God gave us over the creation.

Just as people grow to be untrustworthy and no longer easy to love, the creation has also been changed from what it originally was. Look at a tended garden coming into bloom and its bounty of fruits and vegetables when they are ready for harvest. These things allow us to catch a glimpse of how the land responds to the hand of humanity which God placed in dominion over it. Even though it has the potential, that soil would not provide such a bounty of produce on its own. It literally "yields" a harvest to those who will tend it.

If you look at the way "domesticated" animals respond to one who has earned their trust, you can see creation responding with affection and submission to man, the trustworthy steward. Our pets, livestock and gardens are all that remains of the world that was once willingly in submission to the dominion placed in our hands in Eden. Yet even now, the resistant spirit of the Fall and the fear of corrupted man can be "*trained*" out of many animals. This displays something of how the roles between man and animal were in their original relationship before the Fall.

SOMEHOW WE HAVE TO CHANGE

People are right to recognize that we are no longer in "*the Garden*." Their error is to assume that we could somehow go back under our own strength if we would only stop acting irresponsibly. This is just not accurate. What separates us from Eden is not just a few thousand years of mismanaging our resources. We were evicted from Eden as part of the Fall. As a result of our disobedience, we were banished from the Garden. Like childhood, we cannot go back to it. If we could, what makes you think that Eden would remain an unpolluted garden with people like us there.

Do not be deceived into thinking that anything we can do will restore this world into a utopia. The earth is not heaven and it will never be. At times it can be a pleasant place to live, but always remember that we have been told to look forward to the promise of being in a place where there will be no death, pain or mourning.¹⁵³ We are not meant to be satisfied here.

In some communities, the water which comes out of their faucets is so smelly and bitter-tasting that they use a special filter to make it pure once again before they will drink it. Jesus spoke of the need for a person to be changed. Like this unusable water, corrupted hearts must begin the process of being made clean. "You must be born again,"¹⁵⁴ is what he told Nicodemus, a religious leader of Israel. The ordinary must be changed, reborn, through divine intervention. Our citizenship is changed from the kingdom of the world to the kingdom of God. Jesus was not here simply to show us a better way. He is salvaging, recycling if you will, people out of the world which has been polluted and corrupted. He is making them pure, as he prepares them to be his own.

Some people will say that because humanity is presently operating outside the balance of nature, that we are a threat to its continued existence. Although they may not realize what they are saying, they are pointing out the depravity of fallen man. Those who look at the condition of the world and the behavior of man and conclude that Eden is gone are right. It has been gone since the Fall of man. The balance of nature in the wild pristine places that they are defending is not God's good creation.

The world that we live in has been changed from its original Eden-like state by the curse described in Genesis 3. The natural world that we are familiar with is actually the original “good” creation altered by the compounding effects of the thousands of years that have passed since the “Fall.” Nature, as we know it, is God’s groaning creation.¹⁵⁵

RESTORING THE FRUITFULNESS OF THE LAND

However, at times we are given glimpses of the curse being reversed. These reversals are the “first fruits” of what Romans 8:21 describes as the liberation that all creation awaits. An example of this from the Bible is the momentary reversal of the Babel’s confusion of languages during Pentecost. As you will remember from the book of Acts, when the disciples preached on that day each person in the multi-ethnic crowd could hear them speak as if in their own native language. While on the surface this might appear to be a case of the disciples each being given the ability to speak in a language they did not previously know, a closer reading suggests that this is not the proper interpretation. Acts 2:8 states that “*each one heard them speaking in his own language*”. It was not the speakers that were being changed, it was the hearers. The “language barrier” that was imposed upon the creation in Genesis 11, at the Tower of Babel as a judgment to restrain our prideful rebellion, was temporarily suspended as a blessing upon the young Church.

Similar suspensions of the curse are still being granted to the Church today. George Otis, Jr., in his book “*Informed Intercession*”, reports of the changes in the fertility of agricultural land in a Central American town which occurred following a spiritual revival that transformed the entire culture. One physical manifestation of that spiritual change was the transformation of the bounty which the land yielded. I will let the author tell the story in his own words:

Almolonga, Guatemala:

In the mid-1970s, the town of Almolonga was typical of many Mayan highland communities: idolatrous, inebriated and economically depressed. Burdened by fear and poverty, the people sought support in alcohol and a local idol named Maximon. Determined to fight back, a group of local intercessors got busy, crying out to God during evening prayer vigils. As a consequence of their partnership with the Holy Spirit, Almolonga ... has become one of the most thoroughly transformed communities in the world. Fully 90 percent of the town’s citizens now consider themselves to be evangelical Christians. As they have repudiated ancient pacts with Mayan and syncretistic gods, their economy has begun to blossom. Churches are now the dominant feature of Almolonga’s landscape and many public establishments boast of the town’s new allegiance.

Almolonga is located in a volcanic valley about 15 minutes west of the provincial capital of Quetzaltenango (Xela). ... Tidy agricultural fields extend up the hillsides behind plaster and cement block buildings painted in vivid turquoise, mustard and burnt red. Most have corrugated tin roofs ... The town’s brightly garbed citizens share the narrow streets with burros, piglets and more than a few stray dogs.

Although many Christian visitors comment on Almolonga’s “clean” spiritual atmosphere, this is relatively recent development. “Just twenty years ago,” reports Guatemala City pastor Harold Caballeros, the town suffered from poverty, violence and ignorance. In the mornings you would encounter many men just lying on the streets, totally drunk from the night before. And of course this

drinking brought along other serious problems like domestic violence and poverty. It was a vicious cycle."

Donato Santiago, the town's aging chief of police, told me during an October 1998 interview that he and a dozen deputies patrolled the streets regularly because of escalating violence. ... The town, despite its small population, had to build four jails to contain the worst offenders. ... There was disrespect toward women and neglect of the family. Dr. Mell Winger, who has also visited Almolonga on several occasions, talked to children who said their fathers would go out drinking for weeks at a time. ... In an effort to ease their misery, many townspeople made pacts with local deities like Maximon (a wooden idol rechristened San Simon by Catholic syncretists) ... "He's not just a wooden mask," [insists Mariano Riscajche, pastor of the thriving El Calvario Church], ... "but a powerful spiritual strongman."

In August 1994 Riscajche led a small group of believers into a series of prayer vigils that lasted from 7 P.M. to midnight. Although prayer dominated the meetings, these vanguard intercessors also took time to speak declarations of freedom over the town. ... In the months that followed, the power of God delivered many men ... At this same time, God was healing many desperately diseased people. Some of these healings led many to commit their lives to Christ ... By late 1998 there were nearly two dozen evangelical churches in this Mayan town of 19,000 and at least three or four of them had more than 1,000 members. Church leaders include several men who, in earlier years, were notorious for stoning believers. ...

The contents of the stores have also changed. Once people stopped spending their money on alcohol they actually bought out several distressed taverns and turned them into churches. This happened over and over again. ... As the drinking stopped, so did the violence. For 20 years the town's crime rate has declined steadily. In 1994, the last of Almolonga's four jails was closed.

EVEN THE TOWN'S AGRICULTURAL BASE HAS COME TO LIFE. [emphasis added] For years crop yields around Almolonga were diminished through a combination of arid land and poor work habits. But as the people have turned to God they have seen a remarkable transformation of their land. "It is a glorious thing," exclaims a beaming Caballeros. "Almolonga's fields have become so fertile they yield three harvests per year." In fact, some farmers I talked to reported their normal 60-day growing cycle on certain vegetables has been cut to 25. Whereas before they would export four truckloads of produce per month, they are now watching as many as 40 loads a day roll out of the valley.

Nicknamed "America's Vegetable Garden," Almolonga's produce is of biblical proportions. Walking through the local exhibition hall I saw (and filmed) five-pound beets, carrots larger than my arm and cabbages the size of oversized basketballs.

"Now," says Caballeros, "these brothers have the joy of buying big Mercedes trucks - with cash." And they waste no time in pasting their secret all over the shiny vehicles. Huge metallic stickers and mud flaps read "The Gift of God," "God is My Stronghold" and "Go Forth in Faith." ...

It is a beautiful spectacle to go and see the effect of the gospel, because you can actually see it - and that is what we want for our communities, for our cities and for our nations. ...

How significant are these developments? In a 1994 headline article describing the dramatic events in Almolonga, Guatemala's premier news magazine *Cronica Semanal* concluded "the Evangelical Church ... constitutes the most significant force for religious change in the highlands of Guatemala since the Spanish conquest."¹⁵⁶

REVERSING THE CURSE

If this sounds like a fabrication, you don’t have to take his word for it. You can see it for yourself if you go there today, or you can watch it on the video “*Transformations*.”¹⁵⁷ As was mentioned earlier, at Pentecost God had temporarily suspended one of the restrictions he had imposed on mankind, the confusion of languages, in order to physically endorse the message that the Apostles’ were bringing. In much the same way, this sudden unprecedented change in the bountifulness of the land can be seen as God physically endorsing what the Church was experiencing.

The environmental implications of this are profound! Doomsday ecologists for years have been warning that mankind could not feed itself as population continues to increase and the fertility of the land becomes depleted. To a large extent this fearfulness has been the motivating factor behind western nations promoting abortion as a family planning "necessity" to third world countries. The logic that they use is mankind is a curse upon the land, not a blessing. Additional children are a curse upon their countries, not a blessing.

In effect, such a negative response to the physical the depletion of resources that we experience is ignoring what God is doing. These things are being allowed in order to discipline us and to cause us to end to our rebellion against him. God withholds a portion of his physical blessings from us to persuade us to turn our hearts back to Him. However, instead of asking our Heavenly Father why we are being disciplined, we convince ourselves that these things are "natural" occurrences. We then use our own efforts try to undo the disciplining that we are experiencing.

What is happening in Guatemala makes it clear that God is able to bless those that turn to Him in repentance and collectively change their ways. This is a flesh and blood example of God intervening in His creation today. It provides physical evidence as confirmation of the fact that spiritual changes that are taking place in the community are authentic. This also supports the Bible’s credibility concerning its eye witness accounts documenting God’s historic interventions into the “natural” realm. In those days, God intervened in His creation, using nature to rebuke and to bless. He is the same today as He was then. He is still able to use nature to rebuke and to bless us.

What are we to make of the sudden increase in the fruitfulness of the agricultural land which has been documented as occurring at the same time as an entire community turned its heart toward God? That is obvious! If you want to get serious about environmental protection, it is time that you get serious about your relationship to the God of the Bible!

CHAPTER 14

THE SILENCING OF NATURE'S SONG

*"shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music."
Psalm 98:3-4*

GOD'S WORKMANSHIP SINGS TO HIM

In the Book of Psalms, the individual members of nature are frequently described in terms which tend to personify them. Commonly, such language is ignored as being poetic rather than literal, yet because it has been included as part of the Bible the implications of these passages must not be so quickly dismissed. When balanced against the rest of what the Bible teaches, it is apparent that these passages do not mean that the mountains, fields, rivers and trees collectively or individually have personality traits. Neither does the Bible teach that nature has equality with the descendants of Adam who were placed in stewardship over it.

However, these passages are clearly a reminder that the rest of the creation is not inert and forsaken by the Creator. Man is not the only part of the creation which has a relationship with God. The rest of the creation acknowledges him as Creator too. They also have been promised a restoration.¹⁵⁸ But the Bible does not call God creation's Father, neither was the world created in his image. God's creation reflects his handiwork to the creatures within it and to all the heavenly hosts, but the Bible does not teach that God is present among us as nature.

The creation is not alive in the sense that some may picture "*Mother Nature*" to be the creative or sustaining force in the world. It is God, not nature that called light out of the darkness, set the electrons in orbit around each nucleus and put the breath of life into the creatures of the field. But still Scripture indicates that the various organic and non-organic components of the creation are in some way "*alive*" in the sense that they interact with and respond to God in something more than a mechanical way.

This is what Psalm 96 refers to when it says:

"Let the heavens rejoice, and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy; they will sing before the Lord."¹⁵⁹

Note how all inclusive the language is. Not only the fields, but everything in them. Since "everything", referring to the animals and plants, is called out separately, what remains, the soil, water and stones are included too. This indicates God's relationship with all his creation. Not as thinking beings with emotions, but at least as those whose existence is somehow able to "sing for joy ... before the Lord."

Paul tells us that the "creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed", because "the creation was subjected to frustration".¹⁶⁰ The chemical components of the land, sea and air, as well as individual creatures within the creation, have had their purpose frustrated.

The creation, suffering under the curse, has been stripped of its original lushness and health. It is at war within itself, with one creature turned against another as predators and as parasites. Nature has been

ruthlessly over-hunted, eroded, paved, and contaminated. Still, the creation is "eager" to be all that it was meant to be, and apparently has been promised that it will be given that opportunity.

It awaits the promised release from the curse and sings like a child waiting for the final bell on the last day of the school year. This is why Jesus said that if the children had not sung out in excitement as the redeemer of mankind entered Jerusalem to restore creation's fallen caretaker, man, then the stones themselves would have cried out.¹⁶¹

This obviously is not a common-place occurrence. It says that there is a frustration being pent-up by the elements and organisms as a result of their inability to perform the mandates that they were given at the time of their creation. As though inside a champagne bottle, that pent-up joy had to be expressed like the popping of a cork, if not by the songs of the guileless children, then by the innocent minerals in the rocks.

Even in its fallen condition, nature makes music to God and for God, as it offers its praise to him. This is part of what the Psalmist is telling us in Psalm 148, when he says:

"Praise him, sun and moon, praise him all you shining stars. ... Let them praise the name of the Lord for he commanded and they were created. ... Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths ... you mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, wild animals and all cattle, ... young men and maidens, old men and children. Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted"¹⁶²

Along with the choir of people that the Psalmist depicts worshipping God, the earth itself is shown proclaiming the glory of the Lord. This Psalm is not just an isolated passage that can be ignored as having had its true meaning lost during in translation. The creation's praise to God is a common theme of the Psalmist:

"all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. ... shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music. ... Let the rivers clap their hand, let the mountains sing together for joy; let them sing before the Lord".¹⁶³

"the trees of the forest will sing for joy; they will sing before the Lord, for he comes, he come to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth."¹⁶⁴

Never forget that the righteous judgment of the Lord is something that nature will sing for joy over. It will be the return of the rule of God over his creation. What appears to be the utter devastation of nature being depicted in the Book of Revelation is actually what the creation eagerly awaits. It is as though creation's present discomfort is its pregnancy and it must still go through the pains of labor before the transfiguration of the creation can be given birth.

Similarly, the pain that the creation must undergo is like the pain of surgery. The Great Physician must do the body of creation physical harm to remove the illness and restore the creation to health.

WORSHIPPING GOD THROUGH NATURE

For the people of Israel, God's presence filled the temple and prior to that the tabernacle. David referred to the tabernacle which housed the ark of the covenant as "the place where your glory dwells."¹⁶⁵ God's

handiwork was manifest in the creation and all its beauty, vastness and bounty, but his presence was not in nature. His presence was specifically focused in his temple and the Ark of the Covenant that was set before Israel. Today, in the period after the Holy Spirit has been sent as the guide for the Church, it is in the hearts of men and women, made in his image, that God's spirit dwells upon the earth. The Bible says that since Pentecost the place where the Holy Spirit resides is in people, rather than in plants, animals or temples.

God had given specific direction to the nation of Israel concerning how he expected them to act in their relationship with him. He rejected the strange fire offered by Aaron's sons, which violated the instructions he had given them for proper worship.¹⁶⁶ He rejected the offering made by Saul, who would not wait for God's prophet, Samuel, to seek the Lord's favor.¹⁶⁷ Even before Israel was a nation, God had rejected the fruit of the soil that Cain presented to him as an offering. Yet God offered reassurance to Cain saying, "If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?"¹⁶⁸ It is clear that if we desire to restore our relationship with God, we have to do it under his conditions.

The Bible uses the religions of the nations around Israel as examples of worship that was not pleasing to God. Over and over the prophets condemned the worship and sacrifices in the "*high places*", which Israel copied from its neighbors. This offers an interesting example of people doing their best to be creative in approaching God. Picture a hilltop by a fruitful vineyard or olive grove. It would have a view for miles. Fragrant blossoms and vibrant colors would fill the formal gardens around the outdoor shrine. The carved stone, woodwork and bronze fittings made with the utmost care and detail would be used as part of the offering of praise to God here in the midst of his glorious creation.

People desire to use their creativity and imagination to find new and better ways of honoring and approaching God. Romans chapter 1 explains the knowledge of God that all people have in this way:

"since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made."¹⁶⁹

So then it is understandable that people would seek to honor God in the midst of what he has made. But the problem is not in our using the creation as part of our acts of worship, the problem is in the hearts of the people. This creativity was not commended in Scripture. Rather than seeing the artistry being offered as an act of devotion, God viewed it in a very different way:

"Judah did evil in the eyes of the Lord. By the sins they committed they stirred up his jealous anger ... they set up for themselves high places ... on every high hill ... the people engaged in all the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites."¹⁷⁰

The people were being disobedient to the clear instructions they had been given concerning how to show God proper respect. Why would God have been so uncompromising in specifying exactly what his people were allowed to do when they brought their petitions to him? It would appear that if we worship God in a manner too close to nature, we will inevitably become confused about where nature ends and where God begins. This was one reason why God was so strict in prohibiting his people from letting their imagination distract them from who he really is. Once we are distracted from who God is and what he is really like, we begin to worship what we can see, nature. The Bible describes it this way:

"For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. ... They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator."¹⁷¹

All that God has made worships him along with us. But God is not honored when we are devoted to some fanciful view of who he is. We are prone to praise his handiwork, rather than praising him for his handiwork. It is too easy for us to start "*thanking the table*" where we find our daily bread, rather than our Father who has provided it for us.

What is your response to the joy in your heart when you see the lushness, the ingenuity, the ornate design and the over-whelming beauty of the world around us? Is there a feeling of gratefulness just to be alive? Is there awe that the workmanship we see is so much greater than our own? Do you feel like a creature or a steward, a participant in the creation or its caretaker? Do you see the earth as alive and yourself as a part of it, or do you see the earth as a gift of great value which has been entrusted to you for a brief time? The biblical answer to these questions is clear. We are tenants of God's vineyard, who have been commissioned to be caretakers of his property.

Almost 2000 years ago Paul was warning that godless men in their foolishness "worshipped and served the created things rather than the creator".¹⁷² Things have not changed that much since then. We still must be aware that we are susceptible to this same mistake.

WE ARE MUTING NATURE'S PRAISE OF GOD

All that has been created is called to honor God. This is one of the purposes of man and of nature. Giving glory to God is something that can be done by all things, animate and inanimate, not just by those who are made in his image. Whatever ways had been provided for inanimate objects and unthinking creatures to praise God, have been rendered a bit more silent by the Fall and the consequences of our continued rebellion. In its fallen state, creation has been muted from clearly declaring the glory of God to all onlookers.

If we are commanded and exhorted to praise God, there are apparently ways that man and nature can fail to bring glory to God. In light of this, how are we, with our dominion over the creation, to properly treat what is around us as we make use of it to meet our basic needs?

Obviously, if the creation is making music to God, we should not do anything that would mute this praise, since our own actions are also meant to be for the praise and glory of our Father. But instead of living our lives in appreciation of what God has given us, we are a self-absorbed people. Most of us are too busy to give God credit for what he has done or to thank him.

Before we can appreciate how we are failing to worship God, we need to have a basic understanding what that means. Since we are called to "praise" and "glorify the Lord" and "exalt his name",¹⁷³ we need to determine what it means to praise him. When opinion polls are taken to judge the public's approval of their leaders, the highest praise a supporter of the president can express is to say that they consider his job performance to be "excellent". If a new movie or new restaurant opens which is superior to anything else available, word spreads quickly that this is something special. The actors, director or chef receives public acclaim and eventually awards. When you enter an old cathedral, though some might consider the style excessive, the workmanship is superior and the architect, builder and craftsmen are given credit for their fine work.

These are just touching the edges of what it means to praise someone. Our opinion of God's leadership and work is excellent. By word of mouth we let others know that we appreciate that he is something special and

is the superior architect and builder. By our actions we show that we have respect for who he is and what he has done.

Nature, as God's handiwork, is one of his expressions of himself to us. Because of this, science glorifies God. A knowledge and appreciation of nature brings his character more into focus for us. He is magnified.

If the good creation which God made and placed in Eden gave him joy and caused him to be praised, then the destruction of these things have the potential to lessen his joy and prevent him from being praised. This would appear to have been Satan's motive in defacing the creation. When man succumbed to Satan's temptation in Eden, the result was the Fall and the subsequent curse upon the creation. In this way, Satan caused sickness, suffering and death to enter the world. He wrestled the ownership of the world from man, who had been given the earth to be God's tenant. The land, thus cursed with thorns, decay and deterioration, was defaced from its original condition.

An example of Satan's motives might be found in a friend's story of buying a house. They purchased a house in a foreclosure auction, but at the time of the closing the former owner had not yet left. The former owner was enraged at having his dream house taken away from him, so he did what harm he "*legally*" could before being forced to leave. He kept the new owners out as long as he could before the authorities would have removed him. In that period he stole fixtures, hauled away an outbuilding and left a multitude of filth behind. If he had been able to get away with it, he probably would have leveled the house and contaminated the property. Why? Because he felt he had been wronged by the system and was venting his anger.

Can you see Satan in this image? Satan questioned whether God was in fact greater than he was, presuming to be an equal. His boast was, "I will make myself like the Most High."¹⁷⁴ He was wrong and was punished for it. Because the punishment appears to be occurring in stages, Satan, like the evicted homeowner, had the opportunity to express his anger at the system's "*unfairness*" from his point of view. Since that time, he has been doing as much damage as he could. Perhaps, like the homeowner, he felt that the world should have been his.

Jesus described Satan as a liar and murderer,¹⁷⁵ as well as a thief and a robber.¹⁷⁶ By causing the creation to become deformed in the Fall with its suffering, death, mutations and wickedness, Satan impaired the creation's capacity to play its part in displaying the character of God.

Edith Schaeffer described the devastating effects of the Fall this way:

"Have you ever been through an art museum after it was vandalized? Have you ever seen a beautiful home after vandals got through with it? ... Adam and Eve are given the marvelous garden, landscaped for them by the Gardener who also created the plants in the first place ... But what happened to ruin it? Where did this vandal come from? ... Lucifer was the most beautiful of the angels ... he chose to rebel against the leadership of God. ... this is the vandal who caused the world to become a spoiled place. The vandal who stalked through God's art museum with a hatred which slashed out in meaningless destruction."¹⁷⁷

The impact of the Fall upon the good creation is in part the vandalism from Satan's hatred of what brings praise to God. Yet we should not give the Devil credit for having more power than he has. The curse came through the removal of God's blessing upon the creation in order to discipline fallen man. The deteriorated state of the environment that we see today is not simply the result of Satan's vandalism. It is also the consequence of man's own lack of wisdom and ability in trying to continue to operate as the steward of creation after having lost the ability to clearly hear God's guidance.

Man has been using the creation solely to serve his own appetites. This has further diminished the praise which God would otherwise receive through the manifestation of his wisdom and power in the beauty of what he has made. This abuse has caused the clear display of God's character through the creation to be diminished. Each day nature has less capacity to glorify God.

THE MOURNING OF THE STEWARD

The world which man now looks upon is no longer complete in all its complex beauty and balance, as it was originally designed and created. We have tended to assume that nature, as we see it accurately reflects God's design and God's character. Therefore, humanity has a distorted image of who God is. We see suffering and death and call it "*nature's balance*" and God's "*good*" design. We see creatures stalking one another and consuming each other alive and we try to be noble in our squeamishness, saying this was the only way "*nature*" has provided to give them food.

A friend tells a story of how when she was a young child she sat on the back step of her house watching a frog in the yard with fascination. It was not fleeing from her, resting only a few feet away. Without warning a snake sprung upon the frog and swallowed it whole. The startled child began screaming. The sanctity of the peaceful creation had been defiled. Her momentary pet had been reduced to being a meal for an aggressor. She had been right there, but was powerless to rescue her little companion.

Her reaction seems normal enough for a child. But if this was simply part of God's good creation, why would we think that someone with an innocent young mind would react with such horror? Did our heavenly Father purposely design a world where his creatures would live in terror? Of course not! She reacted in this way because she was still mentally operating in the innocence of Eden. This event was part of her education concerning the effects of the Fall. Unlike adults who have become calloused over time, who watch violence on television for entertainment, she still reacted as one whose view of the world was pristine.

There is a reason that the bloodshed in nature is abhorrent to us, but it does not stem from our sense of vulnerability. It is not merely a distant memory of what some suppose our ancestors experienced living in caves, hiding from predators for a million years. It is much more simple than that. We are the stewards of this creation. Our "*memory*" is that of being responsible for the care and safety of these creatures. We feel a sense of horror over our inability to be the shepherd our heart desires to be.

We tend to forget that even though we are part of nature, the Bible tells us that we are different from the rest of it. This difference is more than just the fact that mankind is corrupted and fallen. We have been different from the beginning. Following the creation of the world and all the other creatures, the historical record of the Scriptures tells us:

"Then God said, 'let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the wild animals and over all the creatures that move along the ground.'"¹⁷⁸

If you believe that the Scriptures are the inerrant word of God, and you are willing to say that God was able to communicate clearly by revealing his truth to us through the Bible, then it is a necessary conclusion that man is not just another one of the animals.

Though man has been corrupted in his rebellion, we still have a special value to God. We are not just another collection of amino acids and water in a bag of tissue. His care for us remains personal. He has numbered

the hairs on our head. We are worth more than a bacteria, a tree, a minnow, mouse, lion or whale. We are like them, having been created by the same Creator and Designer. But the breath of life which God breathed into us was a separate creative event, different from the creation of the creatures of the land, sea and air.¹⁷⁹

We must understand that to view ourselves as merely one small link in a vast creation is denying the obvious fact that God has placed us in a position of responsibility to care for his creation. We are not just a participant. We are the keepers of the creation.

William Badke, in his book *Project Earth*, expounds on the concept our being made in God's image:

"[Image] embodies the idea of representing God (ruling as God rules) ... the kings of Israel ... did not rule absolutely but as servants representing God, who was the actual sovereign (Deuteronomy 17:14-20) ..."

"If God made the world and declared it to be good, then any action by which man exploits the earth's resources solely for his own ends is prohibited, because it does not represent God. ..."

"Where was man to fit into the ecological landscape? He was to fit, not as exploiter, but as enhancer of creation's testimony that God is the all-glorious and the ever-nurturing Maker of all that exists."¹⁸⁰

What would happen if we were to weigh our habits and daily decisions from this perspective? We would not only reduce our personal impact upon the land, but our relationship with God would also be changed. We would inevitably gain a deeper appreciation of what God has done for us. If we are to once again be the caretakers we were meant to be, we must begin by applying the basic concepts given to us in the Scriptures. Without that we will not be able to understand and correctly use the stewardship skills and opportunities that we have been given.

PART II – NOTES

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2. Jeremy Rifkin, "*Entropy*", Viking Press, NY, 1980, page 20.
3. Isaiah 59:1
4. John 1:14
5. Romans 5:12 & 14
6. Romans 8:21
7. Genesis 1:20-24
8. Genesis 1:1
9. Genesis chapter 1
10. Exodus 20:11
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12. Revelation 20:6 & 14
13. Henry Morris, "*The Genesis Record*", Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1988, pages 59-61.

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14. John Whitcomb and Henry Morris, "*The Genesis Flood*", Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., Phillipsburg, NJ, 1992, page 258.
15. Michael J. Oard, "*An Ice Age Caused by the Genesis Flood*", Institute For Creation Research, El Cajon, CA 1990, pages 51 & 70-75.
16. Matthew 19:4-5
17. Mark 12:24
18. Matthew 7:6, 10, 15-17
19. John 1:3
20. Genesis 1

21. Genesis 1:25
22. Matthew 7:6
23. Matthew 13:24-30
24. Matthew 15:13
25. John 14:11
26. Mark 6:31-32
27. Mark 6:34
28. Mark 6:35-37
29. Mark 6:52
30. Exodus 11:4, RSV
31. Psalm 119:16
32. Mark 12:7
33. Psalm 2:1-3
34. Luke 19:14
35. Luke 19:27
36. Psalm 2:5
37. Psalm 103:10, 13 & 18
38. Ephesians 2:8
39. Romans 8:21
40. Luke 13:6-9
41. Isaiah 65:1-2
42. Isaiah 65:8
43. Isaiah 65:3, 6 & 12
44. Isaiah 66:2-4
45. Jeremiah 32:30-35
46. Isaiah 65:15
47. Genesis 2:17

48. Genesis 1:30
49. Romans 6:6-7, 2 Timothy 1:10, Hebrews 2:14
50. John 8:44
51. Matthew 22:29 & 31
52. Matthew 7:9-11
53. "What is the chief end of man? - Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him for ever." from "*The Shorter Catechism*" Question #1, written in 1648, "Westminster Confession of Faith", Free Presbyterian Publications, Glasgow, Scotland, 1994, page 287.
54. Lynn White, Jr., "*The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis*," *Science* 155, 1203-1207, March 10, 1967, as quoted by Gunn & Vesilind in "*Environmental Ethics For Engineers*", Lewis Publishers, Inc., Chelsea, Michigan, 1987, page 21.
55. Alastair Gunn & P. Aarne Vesilind, "*Environmental Ethics For Engineers*", Lewis Publishers, Inc., Chelsea, Michigan, 1987, page 24.
56. Genesis 3:17-18
57. Peter Marshall & David Manuel, "*The Light and the Glory*", Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, NJ 1977, page 127.
58. Michael J. Oard, "*An Ice Age Caused by the Genesis Flood*", Institute For Creation Research, El Cajon, CA, 1990, page 125.
59. Al Gore, "*Earth in Balance - Ecology and the Human Spirit*", Houghton & Mifflin, NY, NY 1992, page 243.
60. *Ibid.*, page 244.
61. *Ibid.*, page 258.
62. *Ibid.*, page 258.
63. Matthew 22:29, John 11:35-38
64. Romans 1:14 & 20
65. Romans 10:14
66. 1 Corinthians 15:51, New English Bible
67. 1 John 3:2
68. 1 Corinthians 15:35-37, 42-44, 49
69. 1 Corinthians 15:53, 54
70. James 1:2-4
71. James 1:12

72. Hebrews 5:8
73. Isaiah 59:1
74. Genesis 50:20
75. Job 36:29, 31, & 37:5
76. John 12:31
77. Job 1:9-19
78. Psalm 105:29-35
79. Psalm 104:32
80. Mark 4:39 & 41
81. Luke 13:34-5
82. Psalm 107:24-31
83. Matthew 8:24-5
84. Matthew 8:26
85. Philippians 1:6
86. Max Lucado, "*In the Eye of the Storm*", Word Publishing Dallas, 1991, page 182.
87. Titus 3:1
88. Exodus 7-9
89. Revelation 3:17-9
90. Revelation 3:20
91. Isaiah 5:1-7
92. Micah 6:8
93. Isaiah 5:4
94. It is worth noting here that the Bible, through this parable, indicates that the forces of nature are restrained to protect the ecology that God had set-up in his vineyard. The forces of nature are responsible for the deterioration of the earth's original ecology, not its advancement.
95. Isaiah 5:7
96. Jeremiah 13:10, 11
97. Jeremiah 35:15
98. Isaiah 5:1-7

NATURE – God’s Groaning Creation

99. Isaiah 2:2-4; 4:2, 4 & 5
100. Luke 13:8-9
101. Romans 3:23
102. Romans 6:23
103. Romans 2:3-5
104. Luke 13:1-5
105. Matthew 13:24-30
106. Proverbs 16:4
107. Psalm 136:1
108. Romans 3:23
109. Romans 3:12
110. Genesis 2:17
111. Romans 13:3-4
112. Matthew 6:12
113. Psalm 78:3-7
114. Psalm 78:10-11, 57, 31-33
115. Luke 24:6
116. Matthew 16:9
117. John 20:29
118. Philippians 4:4-6
119. Romans 2:15
120. 1 Timothy 4:2
121. Hebrews 3:13
122. Psalm 32:3
123. Malachi 3:6
124. Psalm 32:5 & 11
125. Ecclesiastes 5:19-20, RSV

126. Psalm 32:10
127. Jeremiah 12:1 & 4
128. Jeremiah 12:7, 10, 11 & 13
129. Jeremiah 14:22
130. Jeremiah 16:21
131. Jeremiah 14:4-5
132. Jeremiah 12:15-17
133. Hebrew 12:11
134. 1 Kings 18
135. Genesis 41
136. Exodus 33:19, Romans 9:15
137. Exodus 9:16, Romans 9:17
138. 1 John 1:10
139. Exodus 12:6
140. Genesis 1:29-30
141. Genesis 4:2-5
142. Leviticus chapters 1 through 7
143. Hebrews 9:22
144. Psalm 51:17
145. Genesis 22
146. Isaiah 1:11
147. Revelation 21:5
148. Luke 7:47
149. "*The End of Antibiotics*" by Sharon Begley, Newsweek, March 28, 1994, pages 46-51.
150. Genesis 3:17
151. Romans 6:23
152. In Matthew 16:26, Jesus indicates that even if a man owned the earth it would not be enough to

ransom his soul. "What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?"

153. Revelation 21:4
154. John 3:7
155. Romans 8:22
156. "*Informed Intercession*" by George Otis, Jr., Copyright 1999, Gospel Light / Regal Books, Ventura, CA 93003, pages 18-23. Used by permission.
157. The *Transformations* video is distributed by The Sentinel Group, P.O. Box 6334, Lynnwood, WA, 98036.
158. Romans 8:21
159. Psalm 96:11-12
160. Romans 8:19-20
161. Luke 19:40
162. Psalm 148:3, 5, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13
163. Psalm 98:3-4, 8-9
164. Psalm 96:12-13
165. Psalm 26:8
166. Leviticus 10:1-4
167. 1 Samuel 13:7-14
168. Genesis 4:7
169. Romans 1:20
170. 1 Kings 14:22-24
171. Romans 1:21-25
172. Romans 1:25
173. Psalm 34:1 & 3
174. Isaiah 14:14
175. John 8:44
176. John 10:1

A Different Perspective

177. Edith Schaeffer, "*Christianity is Jewish*," Tyndale Press, Wheaton, IL, 1979, pp 26 & 28.
178. Genesis 1:26
179. Genesis 2:4-7
180. William Badke, "*Project Earth - Preserving the World God Created*," Multnomah Press, Portland, Oregon, 1991, pages 45-6.